Hard questions, honest answers

INSPIRATION

By Alden Thompson

- Did every fact and idea in the Bible come straight from God?
- What about apparent inconsistencies in the Bible?
- If we read the Bible too closely, could we find something that will destroy our faith?
- How much freedom do we have to interpret the Bible?

Would God say today what He said through Paul?

The author tells of a conversation with an Adventist who was concerned that the church might ordain women. "What do you do with Paul's counsel that women are to keep quiet and not have authority over men?" the man asked. Thompson suggested that inspired writers addressed their own culture, and culture changes. As an example, he mentioned the Old Testament laws dealing with slavery.

"I see nothing wrong with slavery," said the man.

"What about polygamy?" asked Thompson.

"Except for elders and deacons, I find nothing in the Bible that would forbid a man from having more than one wife," he replied.

It seems absurd to subscribe to every Bible code in modern times. But how do we know which parts of the Bible apply to us and which don't?

In this book, Thompson shows us how to read the Bible so that God's will shines through puzzling commands and apparent contradictions.

He suggests that we not use the Bible as a *codebook*—an unchanging list of do's and don'ts. We are best served to read it as a *casebook* that reveals how God's eternal principles were applied in changing situations.

If we read the Bible as a *codebook*, we can eat anything we want as long as we avoid unclean meat. Reading the Bible as a *casebook* reveals that the point of dietary laws is good health, so we apply that principle in every dietary choice.

Many laws declare God's principles so clearly that they never go out of date. "Thou shalt not steal" is one example. Even if a specific law no longer applies (such as the command to marry a brother's widow), a study of the law in its original context will give you insights into God's gracious and practical intent.

Widening your perspective on a text to include the spirit with which it was written brings rich rewards in personal Bible study. You'll see more of the character of God and His desire for your life.

Alden Thompson is professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington. He is a columnist in the monthly magazine *Signs of the Times* and a frequent contributor to the *Adventist Review*. He is author of *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?*

"Provocative, challenging, and extremely helpful in answering questions on inspiration. It could be the most significant book published by an Adventist press in this decade."— J. David Newman, editor, *Ministry* magazine.

"It will be a bombshell to many since it describes difficulties faced by Bible readers. . . . It kept me awake and on the edge of my chair."— George R. Knight, professor of church history, SDA Theological Seminary.

"Honest yet careful and faith-building."— Dr. Ralph Neall, chairman of the Division of Religion, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Can we believe the Bible is inspired when we find it contains some apparently inconsistent facts and differences in theology? Yes, says Alden Thompson. These differences tell us how inspiration works.

The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy reveal that God gave writers the freedom to express His message in their own words, logic, and rhetoric. God also adapted His messages to the mind-set of His listeners, as you'll see when Thompson explains why the Old Testament credits God with both good and evil.

Some doubt that the average church member can cope with such an open discussion of Bible difficulties. But Thompson acts out of a pastoral concern for members whose faith wavers as they find only difficulties and no answers. He offers answers that become stepping-stones to discovering how God gave us the Bible—and how to reap a greater blessing as we read it.

Also: How the books of the Bible came to us.
How choices were made between variant readings of ancient manuscripts.

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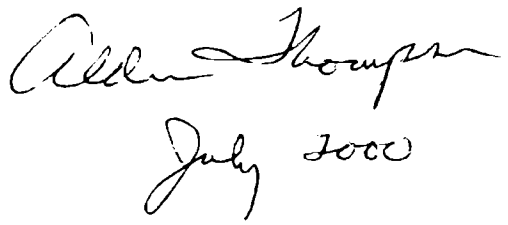


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Hard Questions, Honest Answers

Alden Thompson



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Acknowledgments

The discovery that the Bible is more like a family letter and less like a theoretical treatise has made a profound impact on my life. This is the place for a grateful word to those who have played key roles in nudging me toward that discovery.

First, a special thank you to the members of my Adventist family at the Review and Herald Publishing Association for their willingness to take on a manuscript that could prove volatile. Considering my hopes for the church, the in-house enthusiasm for the manuscript at the Review has been most encouraging. In particular, I am indebted to Penny Wheeler and Richard Coffen for wise editorial direction that nurtured both me and the manuscript until the job was done.

Another significant segment of my Adventist family involves Walla Walla College. I can't think of a more rewarding challenge than teaching Adventist young people in a college setting. I have learned much from my students. In addition, I have been blessed by a stimulating academic environment shaped by students and colleagues throughout the campus. But perhaps my most vivid memories are linked with the School of Theology, my "home" at the college, both as student and as faculty. At a time when many of our sister campuses were being torn by theological strife, the Walla Walla College School of Theology has provided a reassuring example of unity in diversity in a setting both stable and creative. While I was a student in the 1960s, J. Paul Grove and Richard Litke taught me to cherish the Word. When I returned to join the faculty in 1970, a popular senior colleague, Malcolm Maxwell, took me seriously and helped tame my fears of graduate school. Of the "young bucks" who joined the staff with me in the 1970s, Jon Dybdahl and Ernie Bursey have proven themselves of special worth as soul mates and conversation partners.

My Adventist family has shaped my thinking in other ways too. As a youngster in my home church at Clarkston, Washington, I was inspired by two young pastors, Roland Hegstad and Don Jacobsen, and by George Knowles, who led out in public evangelism in our valley. Twenty years later, the tiny Adventist family in Scotland, especially our "home" church in Edinburgh, provided stability while we grappled with the twin shocks of

doctoral studies at the University of Edinburgh and life in a cross-cultural environment far from our American Adventist roots. Our cross-cultural experience was further intensified by a year in Darmstadt, Germany, where I served as an exchange teacher at Marienhoehe Seminary (1980-1981). I learned wonderful things there from the students and faculty. I am particularly grateful to the head of the school, Heinz Henning, and to seminary faculty member Hans Gerhardt. Henning tenaciously supported the exchange in spite of a mountain of obstacles. Gerhardt was an ideal conversation partner. His experience in America enabled him to help me understand the church in Germany.

These cross-cultural contacts, interacting with my study of Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, undoubtedly have been the most significant catalysts for my understanding of Scripture. Yes, Ellen White has indeed contributed positively to my experience. As is evident in the main body of the manuscript, my approach owes a great deal of its inspiration to her writings and to their effect on my religious experience. In part, that positive impact has been a gift from my other family, my biological family.

I owe a profound debt of gratitude to my parents, George and Lola Thompson. They thoroughly infected us children with the love of learning, the love of people, and the love of God. Quite naturally, then, my primary view of authority, divine and otherwise, does not come from the courtroom, in which human beings stand accused and guilty, but from the home, in which human beings are loved and accepted. In Scripture I see God going to great lengths so that every member of the family might be safe. I am also deeply grateful to my siblings and their families for what they have taught me about love, about God, and about human beings: my older sister, Georgene, her husband Bob, and Karlyn, Kori, and Kellie; my younger brother, Albert, his wife Myra, and Geoffrey, Sydney, Phillip, and Adrienne; my younger sister, Lorene, her husband Scott, and Allison, the newest member of the family. The human family can model the things of God. I saw it in my youth; I see it still. And I am grateful.

But my family by birth is only part of God's gift. For the past 25 years my spouse, Wanda, and I have been learning even more of Him together. Her love of art and her passion for all the quiet beauty in our world have been a helpful balance for my love of action. Our daughter Karin has brought a love of music to our home, and our daughter Krista a love of books and ideas. All that makes for a lovely and lively home and a great deal for this father to think about as he considers how God's family letter mediates a knowledge of His will to every one of His children. I am grateful.

Alden Thompson

Dedicated to J. Paul Grove

You wanted us to "hear" Matthew and Jeremiah and Habakkuk
and we did.
But there's more:
—you inspired us to think, believe, and worship
—you taught us to ask questions and to search for answers
—you showed us how to live with some questions
unanswered until the Lord returns
and we are grateful.

Contents

Abbreviations **12**

Preface **13**

PART I: DOCUMENTS
Adventism's Classic Statements on Inspiration

Document 1: *Selected Messages,* book 1, pp. 15-23 . **23**
Document 2: Introduction to *The Great Controversy,* pp. v-xii **30**

PART II: THEORY
The Case for a
"Practical" Approach to Inspiration

Chapter 1 ..... **39**
The Skeptical and the Scared; the Wistful and the Surprised
[See also Appendix A : The Inspiration Issue in Adventist History]

Chapter 2 ..... **46**
A Vision, Fire in the Bones, a Great Idea
[See also Appendix B: Revision of the *Testimonies for the Church]*

Chapter 3 ..... **58**
The Canon: Which Books Belong in Our Bible?
[See also Appendix C: The Meaning of the Word "Apocrypha"]

Chapter 4 ..... **69**
Manuscripts: What if Something Important Is Missing?

Chapter 5 ..... **76**
Translations: Are They Safe?

Chapter 6 ..... **87**
Heavenly Message, Earthen Vessel

Chapter 7 ..... **98**
God's Word: Casebook or Codebook?

Chapter 8 ..... **110**
God's Law: The One, the Two, the Ten, the Many

Excursus A **131**
The Biblical Basis for the Law Pyramid

Excursus B **135**
Ellen White's Commentary on the Nature of Law

PART III: ILLUSTRATIONS
The Problems Are the Solutions

Introduction to Part III **139**

Chapter 9 ..... **147**
Law (#1): Acts 15: Changing Times, Changing Laws

Chapter 10 ..... **151**
Hymns and Prayers (#2): Prayers of Hatred, Innocence, and Godforsakenness

Chapter 11 ..... **154**
Words of the Wise (#3): The Optimist and the Pessimist

Chapter 12 ..... **157**
In the Archives (#4): Research

Chapter 13 ..... **160**
In the Study (#5): Secretaries, Scribes, and Assistants

Chapter 14 ..... **163**
At the Publishers (#6): Editing and Compiling

Chapter 15 ..... **173**
Old Testament Parallel Passages (#7): Samuel-Kings and Chronicles: Same Story, Different Message [See also Appendix D: Old Testament Names for God]

Chapter 16 ..... **187**
New Testament Parallel Passages (#8): One Story, Three Lessons

Chapter 17 ..... **196**
Visions (#9): Documentaries or Animations?

Chapter 18 ..... **205**
Inspired Writers Quoting Inspired Writers (#10): Let the Writers Speak for Themselves

Chapter 19 ..... **214**
Numbers, Genealogies, Dates (#11): Amram's Brothers Were Really Prolific [See also Appendix E: "I Was to Improve Everything"] [See also Appendix F: Approaches to the Exodus]

PART IV: RESULTS

The Christian's Experience
and the Life of the Church

Introduction to Part IV 239

Chapter 20 241
Two Ways to Die: The Slippery Slope or
the Rehoboam Principle

Chapter 21 253
It's All So Very Plain

Summary 260
A Practical Approach:
Key Features and Primary Benefits

APPENDICES

Appendix A 267
The Inspiration Issue in Adventist History
(Ch. 1)

Appendix B 273
Revision of the *Testimonies for the Church*
(Ch. 2)

Appendix C 277
The Meaning of the Word "Apocrypha"
(Ch. 3)

Appendix D 279
Old Testament Names for God
(Ch. 15)

Appendix E 285
"I Was to Improve Everything"
(Ch. 19)

Appendix F 299
Approaches to the Exodus
(Ch. 19)

Appendix G 303
Disagreement: Fruitful or Destructive?
Significant Ellen White Quotations

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND INDICES

An Autobiographical Bibliographical Note 309

References Cited 318

Index 1: Biblical Passages Cited 323

Index 2: Ellen G. White References Cited 327

Index 3: General 329

ABBREVIATIONS: General Reference Works

APOT Charles, R. H., editor. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament.* Vol. 1: *Apocrypha.* Vol. 2: *Pseudepigrapha.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913.

IDB Buttrick, G. A., editor. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 4 vols., plus *Supplementary Volume.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962, 1976.

HBD Achtemeier, Paul, editor. *Harper's Bible Dictionary.* San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1985.

NBD Douglas, J. D., editor. *The New Bible Dictionary.* Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press; Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Incorporated, 1962, 1982.

NIDCC Douglas, J. D., editor. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church.* Exeter, England: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974, 1978.

SDABC Nichol, Francis, D., editor. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary,* 7 vols. Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953-1957. Revised edition, 1976-1980.

SDABD Horn, Siegfried, editor. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary.* Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960, 1979.

ABBREVIATIONS: Ellen G. White Publications

CT *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*

CWE *Counsels to Writers and Editors*

DA *Desire of Ages*

Ed *Education*

EW *Early Writings*

GC *Great Controversy*

MB *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*

PK *Prophets and Kings*

PP *Patriarchs and Prophets*

SG *Spiritual Gifts,* vols. 1-4

SM *Selected Messages,* books 1-3

SP *Spirit of Prophecy,* vols. 1-4

ST *Signs of the Times*

T *Testimonies for the Church,* vols. 1-9

TM *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*

Preface

"If I hadn't taken the inspiration class from Paul Grove last summer at camp meeting," said a church elder, "I probably would be with the dissident Adventists right now."

Another member said, "If only you could have come six months earlier, maybe our church wouldn't have been torn apart."

These voices from the 1980s still ring in my ears. In a sense this book is a response to them. Questions over inspiration, the role of Ellen White in the church, and the authority of Scripture were taking their toll. One of the local conferences in the North Pacific Union had asked the Walla Walla College School of Theology for emergency assistance in a couple key churches. We spent several weekends holding seminars and discussions. Some of the material presented in this book I gave at that time. Given the crisis in the church, the members were ready to listen. But crises pass. The church goes to sleep again. Then we ripen for another crisis.

Why must we wait? Can we not see the continuing trickle of crises over the inspiration issue? We can and should do something about it. But it is not an easy topic to present. I remember another vivid scene, this time from one of my college classes. A student obviously was troubled by what he had discovered as he worked through one of my assignments. When I talked with him, I asked if our earlier discussion in class had helped any.

"Oh, my!" came the quick response. "If we hadn't discussed it first in class, I might have gone out and shot myself." He wasn't joking.

The troublesome assignment that triggered his agitation read: "Compare the two biblical versions of the story of David's census (2 Sam. 24 and 1 Chron. 21), making note of any differences in the two accounts."

I had sensed that this class was experiencing more than the usual difficulties with the assignment. So I had distributed half-sheet evaluation forms asking for anonymous feedback. I needed to know how the students felt in their heart of hearts if I was going to help them.

This one student in particular had caught my attention. Even though the class was large and the forms anonymous, I had already put two and two together (some vivid comments in class and an urgent scrawl on an

evaluation form). After class I asked the student if we could talk. He was more than ready.

I discovered he had done the assignment with a thoroughness that uncovered more "differences" than I had intended—or even realized existed. I had wanted the students to evaluate for themselves the initial verses of the two accounts of David's census. Both versions pass judgment on David for numbering the people. But the author of Samuel says that *God* made David do it, whereas the Chronicler lays the blame on *Satan*. (See discussion in Chapter 15.) If the students could discover the facts ahead of time, discussion of the why would make more sense.

That experience in class, however, raises three crucial questions. First, why do these differences that are so obvious in Scripture elicit such a strong reaction? Second, why would a teacher direct attention to them? Third, why did God allow these differences in the first place?

Bluntly put, this book suggests answers to those questions. Observation has led me to conclude that many Bible-believing Christians suffer from a nagging fear that someone might come up with that one damaging piece of evidence, that one compelling argument, that could destroy the authority of God's Word. But if, as Ellen White observed, "the Lord gave His Word in just the way He wanted it to come" (1SM, p. 21), we don't need to be afraid of what we or anyone else might find in Scripture. Hard searching and many tears may follow, but God has a purpose and plan that He wants us to know.

As I have followed the debates over inspiration both inside the church and out, I have concluded that we have been held captive by the shadowy ghost of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. In that optimistic era, divine revelation was pulled from the throne and human reason crowned king in its place. The Encyclopedia was born, an appropriate symbol for a movement that sought to master the world through human knowledge and understanding. The powerful influence of the Enlightenment on Western culture has lured Christians into the fray in such a way as to muffle the Bible's own voice. Thus, instead of letting the Bible speak for itself, we have attempted to do battle at a *theoretical* level that does not reflect the *practical* and experiential concerns of Scripture itself. When the divine origin of Scripture has been attacked on the basis of philosophical arguments and scientific proofs, devout defenders have responded in kind, citing proofs from archaeology and science. Even proofs from prophecy

have been buttressed with probability statistics.

But does our experience with God and His Word require such "proof"? Why must the true nature of Scripture be obscured by alien questions? I believe the time has come for us to break out of our Enlightenment prison and to shift the focus from a *theoretical* perspective to a *practical* one, one that takes seriously our experience with God, with each other, and with Scripture. To be sure, even a practical approach necessitates a theoretical framework, as I seek to establish in Part II of this book. But the focus throughout is on the practical dimension of Christian experience.

This book reflects a great deal of my own experience. In one sense, it is the easiest book in the world for me to write. It describes the great joy that I have experienced once I overcame my fear that the authority of God's Word might collapse if I examined Scripture too closely. Now that the fear is gone, God's Word is like a precious letter from a friend—except that it is much more powerful than any letter I have ever received from a mere mortal. In the words of Hebrews 4:12, I have discovered that "the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (KJV). And I am eager to share my enthusiasm for the Word.

In another sense, however, this kind of writing is very difficult, for I realize how volatile the topics of revelation and inspiration can be. I continue to be sobered by the experience of that student who told me that one of my assignments could have cost him his life.

Nevertheless, what that student told me about his background helped me understand the intensity of his reaction. Having grown up in a home with an atheist ex-Catholic father and a Bible-believing Baptist mother, he was a relatively new Adventist struggling with the breakup of his own marriage. He recalled that day when he had come home from high school and announced to his mother that he no longer believed in Creation but had become an evolutionist. "She grabbed her umbrella," he said, "and did she ever teach me to believe the Bible!"

Although the following chapters will examine many aspects of revelation and inspiration, the parallel accounts in Scripture itself are perhaps most helpful in revealing how God actually has sent us His Book. When Ellen White wrote that "the Lord gave His Word in just the way He wanted it to come" (1SM, p. 21), she was speaking about the differences in parallel accounts.

It seems to me that we face one of two basic choices. *Either* God

planted these differences in Scripture as some final test to see if we can believe *in spite of* what we see on its pages, *or* He allowed the writers of Scripture to incorporate these differences as a means of expressing their own experience in the things of God, thus enriching our lives *through* what we read in its pages.

Although we must sometimes simply overlook the traces of humanity we find in the Bible, in this book I will argue for the second view: The differences are helpful, and we can be blessed *because* of them, not *in spite of* them. In the words of Ellen White, God gave His Word "through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history" (1SM, p. 21).

Ellen White's view of inspiration enabled her also to say that "there is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures." And she was actually speaking of Scripture when she said "Everything that is human is imperfect" (1SM, p. 20).

Citing Ellen White in conjunction with the topic of inspiration raises significant issues that we also need to address as Seventh-day Adventists. Because of the variety of ways that her writings can influence our discussion, the specific role assigned her writings requires a rather explicit explanation.

When evangelical Christians have dialogued with Adventists, her role has been problematic. They ask: Is her authority equal with that of Scripture? In response to these discussions, the church has attempted to defend Ellen White's prophetic gift. In the book *In Defense of the Faith* (1933) W. H. Branson offers a rebuttal of D. M. Canright's allegations. F. D. Nichol, in *Answers to Objections* (1952), attempts the same—as does *Questions on Doctrine* (1957).

In the present volume I do not attempt to defend Ellen White. Nor do I systematically cite parallels from her writings to illustrate or defend what I find in Scripture. Such an approach, while potentially interesting and helpful, would add inappropriately to the complexity and bulk of this book.

I do propose, however, that we pay particular attention to her explicit comments on inspiration, especially the two classic statements: *Selected Messages,* book 1, pp. 15-23, and the Introduction to *The Great Controversy,* pp. v-xii. For ease of reference, and for reasons both symbolic and substantive, those two classic documents are reproduced here as Part I of this book, a primary point of reference for all that follows. Actually, they

say very little about inspiration that the thoughtful student could not discern from Scripture itself. But in them Ellen White addresses the topic with a remarkable blend of realism and reassurance. Traditional views of inspiration often frighten us away from seeing what would otherwise be obvious in the text. The fact that she "saw" and believed, makes it easier for us, too, to "see" and believe. Using the incarnation as a model, she has developed a view of inspiration that seeks to recognize the human element while retaining the divine authority of the Word. The history of Christian theology reveals the difficulty of finding and maintaining the balance between the two.

In that very connection, part of my rationale for sharing my thoughts in this book is the growing conviction that Adventists are in a unique position to contribute positively to the current debate over inspiration raging among Protestants. I believe that Ellen White's writings can help us find our sea legs, so to speak. We do not need to cite her as an authority to others. But her voice can bring a certain psychological support to those of us who accept her as a messenger of the Lord, thus enabling us to speak with clarity and conviction to others.

I well remember the reaction of a Church of Christ pastor to my presentation on inspiration at a PREACH seminar in Medford, Oregon. When I had concluded, he slipped to the front and thanked me for the careful way in which I had led them through some difficult material. "We never would have accepted it if you hadn't done it so gently," he assured me. Then he asked, "Are there any books you could recommend on the topic? What sources have you used?"

His question caught me off guard, and my first impulse was to affirm that I had been studying the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* and pages 15 to 23 of *Selected Messages*, book 1. Then I realized that these might not be immediately helpful for him. Yet my study of the literature currently available on the topic of inspiration had led me to conclude that a truly incarnational model is hard to find. Authors tend to emphasize either the human or the divine, rather than keep both in balance.

I told him I would send some suggestions to him. I did so, explaining at the same time why I had found Ellen White's writings and experience particularly helpful. In a remarkable manner, she reveals a realistic awareness of the human element while at the same time affirming the divine authority of the Word.

From my own experience and from my observations of other believers, I know that conservative Christians are fearful that making the human element in Scripture too prominent might lead to one concession after another, until nothing of divine authority remains. Names for that fear are legion: *domino effect, a crack in the dike, the camel's nose under the tent, slippery slope*—to name just a few. It seems to me that we need some clear guidance to show us how far we can go and where the boundaries really are. And I believe that Ellen White's explicit statements, taken in conjunction with the data found in Scripture itself, provide just that kind of safeguard.

Key statements from the pen of Ellen White demonstrate that she was both able and willing to recognize certain phenomena in Scripture that the conservative defenders of inerrancy generally resist. Put bluntly, if she could see these "problems" and still believe, so can we. Sociologists would say that she enables us to construct a new "plausibility structure," providing "social support" for a view of inspiration which blends the human and the divine.

Generally, at a superficial level at least, when a view appears plausible to us, we call it "reasonable" and are inclined to see it as reasonable in some global sense. In many cases, however, what we term reasonable is more like consensus, the common thinking of those with whom we closely associate. That which is constantly repeated, drilled into us by authority figures and people we trust, takes on the appearance of ultimate reality. And repetition makes it a permanent part of ourselves. Surely Moses had something like this in mind when he commanded Israel to provide reminders for their children: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6, 7, KJV).

Speaking autobiographically now, I have found that my earlier years had bequeathed to me certain preconceived ideas about Scripture. Further, these preconceptions did not match up well with the evidence in Scripture itself. Actually, in some instances, well-meaning friends had warned me about the dangers of seeing precisely what I was now seeing with my own eyes, or at least thought I was seeing. For example, I had heard somewhere (and it was reinforced in various ways) that if I found so

much as one "error" (I avoid that word in my classes) in the Bible, I might as well toss overboard everything Scripture has to say. Such a threat made reading the parallel accounts in Scripture really risky, because parallel accounts reveal many differences. What should one do with the temptation to call them errors?

When I turned to Ellen White's comments on inspiration in *Selected Messages*, book 1, I found out that she knew about these very differences that I had stumbled upon. Yet she refused to call them errors. And because she has played a key role in my own spiritual formation, I trust her. In terms of my own thinking, the result was simple and straightforward. If she could see the human imperfections in Scripture and still believe, so could I. She made it possible for me to read the Bible without being intimidated by that one hypothetical yet deadly error that I might encounter. Now I don't have to worry about what I might discover when I turn the page.

Some readers will not be as conservative as I am and will not need as much social support to be able to admit to their discoveries in Scripture. But I have worked enough with the material and with enough people in all walks of life to know that most of us have some very conservative tendencies. And that conservatism is actually quite important for our mental and social well-being. If we change too rapidly, we put our families and society at risk.

One of the reasons why the topic of inspiration has become so volatile is that different communities provide social support for different views of Scripture. Disagreeing with the perception of one's own community may present too high a risk. If the new view flies in the face of something the community considers important, the social support for the old prevents the new from being heard. That is why a community that proclaims inerrancy will not tolerate any other viewpoint.

Adventists, however, have a marvelous opportunity to establish, *as a community*, a view of Scripture that gives proper weight to both the human and the divine. Our children, our neighbors, our friends, can then take steps toward faith because of our example. As they traverse the path of faith, they will, of course, discover perplexities that arise from their reading of the Word. But those who have seen and still believe can help their fellow travelers. Then they, too, will be able to see and believe.

So this book is unashamedly for Adventists—for the ultimate purpose

of enhancing our outreach and our mission to the world. I believe that spiritual power flows to us through God's Word. Yet I have sensed that some in my church avoid serious Bible study because they worry about what they might discover when they turn the page. But if the Bible stays closed, how can it be a source of power and joy?

Throughout this book, we will take a hard look at Scripture and deal directly with misconceptions. When helpful, I will note where Ellen White has enabled me to make peace with something I have found in God's Word. By God's grace, this book will enable you, also, to see and believe.

PART ONE

Documents:

Adventism's Classic Statements on Inspiration

▼

Document 1:

Ellen G. White, "The Inspiration of the Prophetic Writers," *Selected Messages,* book 1, chap. 1, pp. 15-23.

The Inspiration of the Word of God

This is a time when the question with all propriety may be asked, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Spiritual darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the people. There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days.

This Holy Book has withstood the assaults of Satan, who has united with evil men to make everything of divine character shrouded in clouds and darkness. But the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape—a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven.

But the oracles of God have been so manifestly neglected that there are but few in our world, even of those [15/16] who profess to explain it to others, who have the divine knowledge of the Scriptures. There are learned men who have a college education, but these shepherds do not feed the flock of God. They do not consider that the excellencies of the Scriptures

will be continually unfolding their hidden treasures as precious jewels are discovered by digging for them.

There are men who strive to be original, who are wise above what is written; therefore, their wisdom is foolishness. They discover wonderful things in advance, ideas which reveal that they are far behind in the comprehension of the divine will and purposes of God. In seeking to make plain or to unravel mysteries hid [for] ages from mortal man, they are like a man floundering about in the mud, unable to extricate himself and yet telling others how to get out of the muddy sea they themselves are in. This is a fit representation of the men who set themselves to correct the errors of the Bible. No man can improve the Bible by suggesting what the Lord meant to say or ought to have said.

Some look to us gravely and say, "Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?" This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.

God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired Word to finite man. This Word, arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them that, by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven. [16/17]

Those who think to make the supposed difficulties of Scripture plain, in measuring by their finite rule that which is inspired and that which is not inspired, had better cover their faces, as Elijah when the still small voice spoke to him; for they are in the presence of God and holy angels, who for ages have communicated to men light and knowledge, telling them what to do and what not to do, unfolding before them scenes of thrilling interest, waymark by waymark in symbols and signs and illustrations.

And He [God] has not, while presenting the perils clustering about the last days, qualified any finite man to unravel hidden mysteries or inspired one man or any class of men to pronounce judgment as to that which is

inspired or is not. When men, in their finite judgment, find it necessary to go into an examination of scriptures to define that which is inspired and that which is not, they have stepped before Jesus to show Him a better way than He has led us.

I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word. I believe its utterances in an entire Bible. Men arise who think they find something to criticize in God's Word. They lay it bare before others as evidence of superior wisdom. These men are, many of them, smart men, learned men, they have eloquence and talent, the whole lifework [of whom] is to unsettle minds in regard to the inspiration of the Scriptures. They influence many to see as they do. And the same work is passed on from one to another, just as Satan designed it should be, until we may see the full meaning of the words of Christ, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Brethren, let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible. It is a work that Satan delights to have any of you do, but it is not a work the Lord has pointed out for you to do.

Men should let God take care of His own Book, His living oracles, as He has done for ages. They begin to question some parts of revelation, and pick flaws in the apparent inconsistencies of this statement [17/18] and that statement. Beginning at Genesis, they give up that which they deem questionable, and their minds lead on, for Satan will lead to any length they may follow in their criticism, and they see something to doubt in the whole Scriptures. Their faculties of criticism become sharpened by exercise, and they can rest on nothing with a certainty. You try to reason with these men, but your time is lost. They will exercise their power of ridicule even upon the Bible. They even become mockers, and they would be astonished if you put it to them in that light.

Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost. The ingenuity of men has been exercised for ages to measure the Word of God by their finite minds and limited comprehension. If the Lord, the Author of the living oracles, would throw back the curtain and reveal His wisdom and His glory before them, they would shrink into nothingness and exclaim as did Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5).

Simplicity and plain utterance are comprehended by the illiterate, by the peasant, and the child as well as by the full grown man or the giant in intellect. If the individual is possessed of large talents of mental powers, he

will find in the oracles of God treasures of truth, beautiful and valuable, which he can appropriate. He will also find difficulties, and secrets and wonders which will give him the highest satisfaction to study during a long lifetime, and yet there is an infinity beyond.

Men of humble acquirements, possessing but limited capabilities and opportunities to become conversant in the Scriptures, find in the living oracles comfort, guidance, counsel, and the plan of salvation as clear as a sunbeam. No one need be lost for want of knowledge, unless he is willfully blind.

We thank God that the Bible is prepared for the poor man as well as for the learned man. It is fitted for all ages and all classes.—Manuscript 16, 1888 (written at Minneapolis, Minn., in autumn of 1888). [18/19]

Objections to the Bible

Human minds vary. The minds of different education and thought receive different impressions of the same words, and it is difficult for one mind to give to one of a different temperament, education, and habits of thought by language exactly the same idea as that which is clear and distinct in his own mind. Yet to honest men, right-minded men, he can be so simple and plain as to convey his meaning for all practical purposes. If the man he communicates with is not honest and will not want to see and understand the truth, he will turn his words and language in everything to suit his own purposes. He will misconstrue his words, play upon his imagination, wrest them from their true meaning, and then entrench himself in unbelief, claiming that the sentiments are all wrong.

This is the way my writings are treated by those who wish to misunderstand and pervert them. They turn the truth of God into a lie. In the very same way that they treat the writings in my published articles and in my books, so do skeptics and infidels treat the Bible. They read it according to their desire to pervert, to misapply, to willfully wrest the utterances from their true meaning. They declare that the Bible can prove anything and everything, that every sect proves their doctrines right, and that the most diverse doctrines are proved from the Bible.

The writers of the Bible had to express their ideas in human language. It was written by human men. These men were inspired of the Holy Spirit. Because of the imperfections of human understanding of language, or the perversity of the human mind, ingenious in evading truth, many read and understand the Bible to please themselves. It is not that the difficulty is in the Bible. Opposing politicians argue points of law in the statute book, and

take opposite views in their application and in these laws.

The Scriptures were given to men, not in a continuous chain of unbroken utterances, but piece by piece through successive generations, as God in His providence saw a fitting opportunity to impress man at sundry times and [19/20] divers places. Men wrote as they were moved upon by the Holy Ghost. There is "first the bud, then the blossom, and next the fruit," "first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear." This is exactly what the Bible utterances are to us.

There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures. The miracles of Christ are not given in exact order, but are given just as the circumstances occurred, which called for this divine revealing of the power of Christ. The truths of the Bible are as pearls hidden. They must be searched, dug out by painstaking effort. Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge, which they think is very deep, talk of the contradictions of the Bible, and question the authority of the Scriptures. But those whose hearts are in harmony with truth and duty will search the Scriptures with a heart prepared to receive divine impressions. The illuminated soul sees a spiritual unity, one grand golden thread running through the whole, but it requires patience, thought, and prayer to trace out the precious golden thread. Sharp contentions over the Bible have led to investigation and revealed the precious jewels of truth. Many tears have been shed, many prayers offered, that the Lord would open the understanding to His Word.

The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.

The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of the Scriptures to suit their own particular minds and cases. Prepossessions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ.

The disciples traveling to Emmaus needed to be disentangled in their interpretation of the Scriptures. Jesus [20/21] walked with them disguised, and as a man He talked with them. Beginning at Moses and the prophets He taught them in all things concerning Himself, that His life, His mission, His sufferings, His death were just as the Word of God had foretold. He opened their understanding that they might understand the

Scriptures. How quickly He straightened out the tangled ends and showed the unity and divine verity of the Scriptures. How much men in these times need their understanding opened.

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.—Manuscript 24, 1886 (written in Europe in 1886).

Unity in Diversity

There is variety in a tree, there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole.

In our Bible, we might ask, Why need Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Gospels, why need the Acts of the Apostles, and the variety of writers in the Epistles, go over the same thing?

The Lord gave His Word in just the way He wanted it to come. He gave it through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history. Their testimonies are brought together in one Book, and [21/22] are like the testimonies in a social meeting. They do not represent things in just the same style. Each has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds. The thoughts expressed have not a set uniformity, as if cast in an iron mold, making the very hearing monotonous. In such uniformity there would be a loss of grace and distinctive beauty. . . .

The Creator of all ideas may impress different minds with the same thought, but each may express it in a different way, yet without contradiction. The fact that this difference exists should not perplex or confuse us. It is seldom that two persons will view and express truth in the very same way. Each dwells on particular points which his constitution and education have fitted him to appreciate. The sunlight falling upon the

different objects gives those objects a different hue.

Through the inspiration of His Spirit the Lord gave His apostles truth, to be expressed according to the development of their minds by the Holy Spirit. But the mind is not cramped, as if forced into a certain mold.—Letter 53, 1900.

The Lord Speaks in Imperfect Speech

The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory.—Letter 121, 1901. [22/23]

No Man to Pronounce Judgment on God's Word

Both in the [Battle Creek] Tabernacle and in the college the subject of inspiration has been taught, and finite men have taken it upon themselves to say that some things in the Scriptures were inspired and some were not. I was shown that the Lord did not inspire the articles on inspiration published in the *Review** neither did He approve their endorsement before our youth in the college. When men venture to criticize the Word of God, they venture on sacred, holy ground, and had better fear and tremble and hide their wisdom as foolishness. God sets no man to pronounce judgment on His Word, selecting some things as inspired and discrediting others as uninspired. The testimonies have been treated in the same way; but God is not in this.—Letter 22, 1889. [23/24]

*Reference here is to a series of articles the writer of which advocated that there were "differences in degrees" of inspiration. See *The Review and Herald,* Jan. 15, 1884.—Compilers.

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Document 2:

Ellen G. White, Introduction to *The Great Controversy*, pp. v-xii.

Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communion with his Maker; but since man separated himself from God by transgression, the human race has been cut off from this high privilege. By the plan of redemption, however, a way has been opened whereby the inhabitants of the earth may still have connection with heaven. God has communicated with men by His Spirit, and divine light has been imparted to the world by revelations to His chosen servants. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21).

During the first twenty-five hundred years of human history, there was no written revelation. Those who had been taught of God communicated their knowledge to others, and it was handed down from father to son, through successive generations. The preparation of the Written Word began in the time of Moses. Inspired revelations were then embodied in an inspired book. This work continued during the long period of sixteen hundred years—from Moses, the historian of Creation and the law, to John, the recorder of the most sublime truths of the gospel.

The Bible points to God as its author, yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the [v/vi] truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine with the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony.

As presented through different individuals, the truth is brought out in its varied aspects. One writer is more strongly impressed with one phase of the subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appreciation; another seizes upon a different phase; and each, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind—a different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all. And the truths thus revealed unite to form a perfect whole, adapted to meet the wants of men in all the circumstances and experiences of life.

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and [vi/vii] what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

In His Word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for

instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17, RV).

Yet the fact that God has revealed His will to men through His Word has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Saviour, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings. And since it was the Spirit of God that inspired the Bible, it is impossible that the teaching of the Spirit should ever be contrary to that of the Word.

The Spirit was not given—nor can it ever be bestowed—to supersede the Bible; for the Scriptures explicitly state that the Word of God is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested. Says the apostle John, "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). And Isaiah declares, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

Great reproach has been cast upon the work of the Holy Spirit by the errors of a class that, claiming its enlightenment, profess to have no further need of guidance from the Word of God. They are governed by impressions which they regard as the voice of God in the soul. But the spirit [vii/viii] that controls them is not the Spirit of God. This following of impressions, to the neglect of the Scriptures, can lead only to confusion, to deception and ruin. It serves only to further the designs of the evil one. Since the ministry of the Holy Spirit is of vital importance to the church of Christ, it is one of the devices of Satan, through the errors of extremists and fanatics, to cast contempt upon the work of the Spirit and cause the people of God to neglect this source of strength which our Lord Himself has provided.

In harmony with the Word of God, His Spirit was to continue its work throughout the period of the gospel dispensation. During the ages while the Scriptures of both the Old and the New Testament were being given, the Holy Spirit did not cease to communicate light to individual minds, apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon. The Bible itself relates how, through the Holy Spirit, men received warning, reproof, counsel, and instruction in matters in no way relating to the giving of the Scriptures. And mention is made of the prophets in different ages, of whose utterances nothing is recorded. In like manner, after the close of the canon of the Scripture, the Holy Spirit was still to continue [His] work,

to enlighten, warn, and comfort the children of God.

Jesus promised His disciples, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: . . . and he will show you things to come" (John 14:26; 16:13). Scripture plainly teaches that these promises, so far from being limited to apostolic days, extend to the church of Christ in all ages. The Saviour assures His followers, "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). And Paul declares that the gifts and manifestations of the Spirit were set in the church "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge [viii/ix] of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, 13).

For the believers at Ephesus the apostle prayed, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the *Spirit of wisdom and revelation* in the knowledge of him: *the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and . . . what is the *exceeding greatness* of His power to usward who believe" (Eph. 1:17-19). The ministry of the Divine Spirit in enlightening the understanding and opening to the mind of the deep things of God's Holy Word was the blessing which Paul thus besought for the Ephesian church.

After the wonderful manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, Peter exhorted the people to repentance and baptism in the name of Christ, for the remission of their sins; and he said: "Ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38, 39).

In immediate connection with the scenes of the great day of God, the Lord by the prophet Joel has promised a special manifestation of His Spirit (Joel 2:29). This prophecy received a partial fulfillment in the outpouring of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost; but it will reach its full accomplishment in the manifestation of divine grace which will attend the closing work of the gospel.

The great controversy between good and evil will increase in intensity to the very close of time. In all ages the wrath of Satan has been manifested against the church of Christ; and God has bestowed His grace and Spirit

upon His people to strengthen them to stand against the power of the evil one. When the apostles of Christ were to bear His gospel to the world and to record it for all future ages, they were especially endowed with the enlightenment of the Spirit. But as the church approaches her final deliverance, Satan is to work with greater power. He comes down "having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a [ix/x] short time" (Rev. 12:12). He will work "with all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thess. 2:9). For six thousand years that mastermind that once was highest among the angels of God has been wholly bent to the work of deception and ruin.

And all the depths of satanic skill and subtlety acquired, all the cruelty developed, during these struggles of the ages will be brought to bear against God's people in the final conflict. And in this time of peril the followers of Christ are to bear to the world the warning of the Lord's second advent; and a people are to be prepared to stand before Him at His coming, "without spot, and blameless" (2 Peter 3:14). At this time the special endowment of divine grace and power is not less needful to the church than in apostolic days.

Through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the scenes of the long-continued conflict between good and evil have been opened to the writer of these pages. From time to time I have been permitted to behold the working, in different ages, of the great controversy between Christ, the Prince of life, the Author of our salvation, and Satan, the prince of evil, the author of sin, the first transgressor of God's holy law. Satan's enmity against Christ has been manifested against His followers. The same hatred of the principles of God's law, the same policy of deception, by which error is made to appear as truth, by which human laws are substituted for the law of God, and men are led to worship the creature rather than the Creator, may be traced in all the history of the past. Satan's efforts to misrepresent the character of God, to cause men to cherish a false conception of the Creator, and thus to regard Him with fear and hate rather than with love; his endeavors to set aside the divine law, leading the people to think themselves free from its requirements; and his persecution of those who dare to resist his deception, have been steadfastly pursued in all ages. They may be traced in the history of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, of martyrs and reformers. [x/xi]

In the great final conflict Satan will employ the same policy, manifest the same spirit, and work for the same end as in all preceding ages. That which has been will be, except that the coming struggle will be marked with a terrible intensity such as the world has never witnessed. Satan's

deceptions will be more subtle, his assaults more determined. If it were possible, he would lead astray the elect (Mark 13:22, RV).

As the Spirit of God has opened to my mind the great truths of His Word, and the scenes of the past and the future, I have been bidden to make known to others that which has thus been revealed—to trace the history of the controversy in past ages, and especially so to present it as to shed a light on the fast-approaching struggle of the future. In pursuance of this purpose, I have endeavored to select and group together events in the history of the church in such a manner as to trace the unfolding of the great testing truths that at different periods have been given to the world, that have excited the wrath of Satan, and the enmity of a world-loving church, and that have been maintained by the witness of those who "loved not their lives unto the death."

In these records we may see a foreshadowing of the conflict before us. Regarding them in the light of God's Word, and by the illumination of His Spirit, we may see unveiled the devices of the wicked one, and the dangers which they must shun who would be found "without fault" before the Lord at His coming.

The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of history, well known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. This history I have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application. In some cases where a historian has so grouped together [xi/xii] events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has summarized details in a convenient manner, his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject. In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works.

It is not so much the object of this book to present new truths concerning the struggles of former times, as to bring out facts and principles which have a bearing on coming events. Yet viewed as a part of the controversy between the forces of light and darkness, all these records of the past are seen to have a new significance; and through them a light is cast upon the future, illumining the pathway of those who, like the

Reformers of past ages, will be called, even at the peril of all earthly good, to witness "for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ."

To unfold the scenes of the great controversy between truth and error; to reveal the wiles of Satan, and the means by which he may be successfully resisted; to present a satisfactory solution of the great problem of evil, shedding such a light upon the origin and the final disposition of sin as to make fully manifest the justice and benevolence of God in all His dealings with His creatures; and to show the holy, unchanging nature of His law, is the object of this book. That through its influence souls may be delivered from the power of darkness, and become "partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," to the praise of Him who loved us, and gave Himself for us, is the earnest prayer of the writer.

E. G. W.

PART TWO

Theory:

The Case for a "Practical" Approach to Inspiration

CHAPTER
ONE
▼

The Skeptical and the Scared; the Wistful and the Surprised

Some years ago I asked a university friend of mine to read and critique some material I had written dealing with Scripture. His response challenged my thinking.

"Your argument does not convince me," he wrote, "though at a certain stage of my intellectual and spiritual development I can see that it would have considerably alleviated my doubts."

He went on to observe that his comments reflected a "continuing dialogue with the God I once knew." Then he added, "If I ever return to faith, it will be as a Jew and not as a Christian."

Though he had not been reared in a Christian home, as a teenager my friend had accepted Christ. His spiritual experience had flourished, and continuing his education, he had become involved with InterVarsity Fellowship, an organization designed to support Christians studying in secular universities.

But as my friend began studying parallel passages in the Gospels, the IVF position upholding the inerrancy of Scripture became troublesome. He and several friends wrote IVF and asked for a more flexible statement on inspiration, one that would seem more compatible with what they found in their daily study of Scripture.

A firm no came back. Inerrancy must stay. Period. That response, combined with a variety of other factors, chipped away at his faith until it was gone.

As I listen to my friend now, the skepticism—indeed, the atheism—is obvious. But I sense a trace of wistful longing for his past experience. He

even commented once that if he had maintained his devotional life, he never would have lost his faith. But it was not to be.

It seems to me that his experience is not unlike a once-happy marriage that has ended in divorce. When love dies, it takes a miracle to make it live again.

My friend's experience constantly lurks in the back of my mind as I teach and preach. One does not have to choose between blind faith and informed atheism. I know there is another alternative. My friend admitted as much when he said that what I had written would have alleviated his doubts at a certain point in his experience.

But simply laying out the facts does not necessarily build faith. Seeing is *not* believing. In fact, if one does not have a meaningful framework within which the facts make sense, seeing can destroy faith. Anyone who has circulated among educated people can tick off name after name of those who have moved higher in their educational endeavors but have lost their faith en route.

Although any one of us could also list off a string of people who have lost their way through ignorance or passion, those who leave because they have seemingly learned too much stand out with painful clarity. The visibility of that tragic loss partially explains the deep-seated fear of education that thrives in conservative Christian circles today. Adventists partake of this tendency, to be sure. But remarkably, Ellen White's prophetic ministry has resulted in something of a sociological anomaly, namely, a conservative Christian body that emphasizes education as part of its mission.

Ellen White's book *Education* continues to be a great inspiration for me. And sprinkled throughout her writings I find choice phrases that encourage intellectual development. She argues, for example, that "ignorance [does] not increase the humility or spirituality of any professed follower of Christ. The truths of the divine Word can be best appreciated by an intellectual Christian" (3T, p. 160).

Elsewhere she chides ministers for the "rusting" of their talents: "They might have done tenfold more work intelligently had they cared to become intellectual giants. Their whole experience in their high calling is cheapened because they are content to remain where they are. Their efforts to acquire knowledge will not in the least hinder their spiritual growth if they will study with right motives and proper aims" (TM, p. 194).

I well remember in the days of my youth the spine-tingling excitement that swept over me when my father read us stories of "intellectual giants"

who were Christians. Reading in *The Great Controversy* Ellen White's stirring words about John Wycliffe still moves me. Here was a man "noted at college for his fervent piety as well as for his remarkable talents and sound scholarship." Ellen White praises that "thirst for knowledge" that drove him "to become acquainted with every branch of learning," including the "speculative philosophy" of his time. "The power of his genius and the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge commanded the respect of both friends and foes. His adherents saw with satisfaction that their champion stood foremost among the leading minds of the nation; and his enemies were prevented from casting contempt upon the cause of reform by exposing the ignorance or weakness of its supporter" (p. 80).

That vision drives me. An irresistible impulse makes me exclaim, "O that it might still live in Adventism!" But just as I build up a head of steam to push for higher attainments for myself and for my church, I am brought down to earth again by the students in my classes, by letters from former students, and by church members who tell me that they are frightened by what they hear. And I am reminded again of another favorite quotation from Ellen White, found in the same volume of the *Testimonies* where she affirms the value of the "intellectual Christian." She cautions against moving too fast. Although the context is health reform, the principle expressed can be applied widely—even to teachers who want to move faster than their students are able to follow.

"We must go no faster than we can take those with us whose consciences and intellects are convinced of the truths we advocate. We must meet the people where they are. Some of us have been many years in arriving at our present position in health reform. . . . If we should allow the people as much time as we have required to come up to the present advanced state in reform, we would be very patient with them, and allow them to advance step by step, as we have done, until their feet are firmly established upon the health reform platform. But we should be very cautious not to advance too fast, lest we be obliged to retrace our steps. In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. And if there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people" (3T, pp. 20, 21).

What is so unsettling for all those who seek reform—parents, teachers, pastors—is that the reforms are desperately needed and are designed to benefit the recipients. In health reform it literally could be a matter of life and death if one moves too slowly. But then the frustrating truth of the quotation sinks in: it is even more deadly if one moves too quickly.

When it comes to the topic of inspiration, Adventists have a history of participating in that classic human tendency of moving both too quickly and too slowly, even at the same time! In the 1880s, 1920s, and 1970s the issue received much agitation. (See Appendix A.) The ferment of the 1970s continues, and this book grows out of it.

As I stand before my classes, as I preach, as I write, I constantly keep in mind our bright students, those who will always see more than our church publications can address. They are quick and probing (and sometimes move too fast for their own spiritual good), and we must do all we can to help them. Each is a potential Wycliffe.

Surprisingly, however, difficulties over the inspiration issue are not limited to a single class of students. I have seen the skeptical, the scared, the wistful, and the surprised come from all classes—from the bright, the average, the struggling. Faith is no easier for the simple than for the sophisticated. The simple can only solve simple problems, and they see only the simple ones. Complex issues sail right by them. By contrast, sophisticated people see all kinds of problems. But that same God-given ability that has enabled them to see great problems also equips them to find great solutions. When it comes to faith, we are all equal before God.

One of the greatest enemies of faith, however, is fear. It keeps us from studying the Bible as rigorously as we might. It makes us conservative and resistant to change.

That word "conservative" is an interesting one. It can carry either a positive or negative flavor. I am quite pleased, for example, to be known as a conservative Christian. In that context "conservative" stands for certain values and a view of God that I cherish.

Surprisingly, Ellen White does not hesitate to use "conservative" in its negative sense. In the context of the 1888 turmoil, she warned against resting on past laurels: "As real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's Word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion" (5T, pp. 706, 707).

A letter from a former student illustrates the challenge of dealing with those who are "conservative and seek to avoid discussion." His letter was by no means malicious. He wrote it with a great deal of feeling, in pain and sorrow to be sure, and in the spirit of Christian love. His letter is a sobering reminder of Ellen White's admonition that "we must be very cautious not to move too fast."

He found my classes "interesting but totally staggering." Then he added: "I don't disagree with most of what you taught, but rather at the time and manner at which you taught it." He gave a list of specifics, claiming that I had taught that "the God of the Old Testament is hard and cruel, but Jesus in the New Testament is not the same character; that the New Testament writers misquoted the Old Testament; that Ellen White copied many of her writings from others." With evident emotion he concluded his letter: "I love you very much and I really enjoy your lectures and illustrations. I read all your articles in the back of *Signs of the Times*. I do agree with most of the things you taught. The proof was most convincing, but is it too much too soon?"

Ironically, the day before that letter arrived, another student exclaimed at the end of class—the same class but now a couple years later—"This is great stuff! But something's not right. We're learning all these good things, and the church isn't. How will the church learn?"

At our next class period I referred to that in-class exclamation and then read portions of the letter I had just received, explaining the great dilemma we face in the church: the risk of going too fast and too slow at the same time. I also shared with the students two previous in-class exclamations, one just a few months old and the other from several years earlier.

In 1980 a young lady commented after one of my Old Testament classes: "My parents would never believe me if I told them this. When are you going to publish it in the *Adventist Review*? My parents believe everything they read in the *Review*."

In 1988 when I referred to my Sinai-Golgotha series that had appeared in the *Adventist Review* (Dec. 1981), another student responded, "I wish my grandparents would read it. But they won't read the *Review*. They read an independent Adventist journal instead."

I couldn't help regretting both positions. Just because an article appears in the *Adventist Review* doesn't make it right—or wrong. Ellen White was perceptive in her very first counsel on education in 1872 when she wrote: "Close reasoners and logical thinkers are few for the reason that false influences have checked the development of the intellect. The supposition of parents and teachers that continual study would strengthen the intellect has proved erroneous, for in many cases it has had the opposite effect" (3T, pp. 142, 143).

Long hours of study, even from the Bible, will not ensure that we will

find the truth. We must be constantly thinking, probing, discussing, praying that the Lord will guide us.

Again in the context of the 1888 discussions, Ellen White counseled: "We should never allow ourselves to employ arguments that are not wholly sound. These may avail to silence an opposer, but they do not honor the truth. We should present sound arguments that will not only silence our opponents, but will bear the closest and most searching scrutiny" (5T, p. 708).

The presence of unsound arguments within our own Adventist tradition is suggested in a different part of the letter from my former student when he implores: "Please remember that preachers try for years to convince converts about the credibility of the Bible, Ellen White, and the church. Finally these converts believe it. Then your class seems to tear apart every fact and proof foundation on which they believed."

That's a bit exaggerated, I suspect. And keep in mind that this same student stated that the proof I had presented in class was convincing. Obviously the challenge before us is daunting. And given the remarkable differences in the people who make up the church, the task of bringing all these people together in one church may seem hopeless at times. But we should not despair. Indeed, a proper understanding of the doctrine of the church suggests that unity can be purchased only through diversity.

With that in mind, I hope this book will make a positive contribution to the life and work of the church. But I must recognize that some will find it more helpful than others. Given my natural urge to be all things to all people, I am often admonished—yet encouraged—by Ellen White's view of how a school and a church must seek to meet the varied needs of a wide variety of people. Addressing the "Bible Teacher" in *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students* she notes that it is not a good idea for young people to have just one Bible teacher year after year: "Different teachers should have a part in the work, even though they may not all have so full an understanding of the Scriptures."

She then refers to the multiple accounts of the same stories in Scripture, arguing that these different versions are necessary "because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain Scripture truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of some than of others."

The same is true of speakers. "The whole truth is presented more clearly by several than by one." Then in a powerful affirmation of how much we need each other, she states: "So today the Lord does not impress

all minds in the same way. Often through unusual experiences, under special circumstances, He gives to some Bible students views of truth that others do not grasp. It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of teaching all that should be taught" (CPT, pp. 432, 433).

God sends us the skeptical, the scared, the wistful, and the surprised. He asks us to minister to all their needs. This too is part of the mystery and the grandeur of His Word. And that is why the Bible continues to exert such a powerful influence in our lives. It deserves our careful attention, our respect, our awe. It is bread for His hungry children.

CHAPTER
TWO

A Vision, a Fire in the Bones, a Great Idea

Some time ago a good friend and New Testament colleague waxed enthusiastic about the value of memorizing scriptures. I decided to follow his lead and see if I could tuck away in my memory some key passages. (That's tougher these days; the older my head gets, the more it acts like a sieve.) Reviving passages I once learned as a youngster has been relatively easy, but the new stuff really takes work! Yet the rewards are real enough to merit a brief commercial on behalf of memorization.

By the late medieval period (1960s), when I was in college, my generation had lost its enthusiasm for memorizing. For us, understanding held more importance. Even now, if I had to choose between the two, I'd vote for understanding. But why choose? Why not some of both?

By contrast, in the early medieval period (1930s), when my father studied at Pacific Union College, he had to memorize 300 Bible verses in one year. Amazing. Unfair. Now he has those passages forever in his memory, and I don't. I'm trying hard not to resent it.

So I have returned to the process of memorization. And while it's much harder now, a mysterious power seems to be at work that wasn't there when I was shooting for gold stars in the junior room at Sabbath school. To my surprise, I am discovering that the constant repetition necessary for memorization at my age is making serious inroads into my heart. The sense of satisfaction that comes from reaching a goal is something I had expected, of course. But I wasn't prepared for the wave of emotion that can sweep in quite without warning. Thus far it has been

occasional and sporadic, but nonetheless, it is making a difference in my life.

What is it about Scripture that empowers it to do things like that? And how does the Bible differ from other books that may have also influenced our lives? These are questions I want to explore in this chapter in connection with three more-or-less technical terms that we need to bring down to earth and make practical: revelation ("a vision"), inspiration ("a fire in the bones"), and illumination ("a great idea"). As we look at those words and the concepts they represent, we will keep asking (1) How does the Bible differ from other books? and (2) How is it the same?

For us the Bible has significant symbolic value, illustrated, for example, by the phrase "the Bible and the Bible only." But that external symbolic value is somehow linked to the content of Scripture. It touches our habits, our understanding, our emotions. And our lives do not remain the same. Why? Looking more closely at revelation, inspiration, and illumination should help us answer that question.

Revelation: "A Vision"

The word "revelation" suggests some kind of special input from God, a message from Him to His creatures on earth. Visions or dreams perhaps come to mind first when we think of revelation. These in turn become the basis for written communication, as in the books of Daniel and Revelation.

Revelation happens in other ways, too: a voice from heaven (Abraham, Jesus); a wrestling match and a dislocated hip (Jacob); a wet/dry fleece (Gideon); words chiseled in stone by God's finger (Moses); finally, God in the flesh, Jesus Christ—the ultimate Revelation. Historically, all these forms would be labeled as *special* revelation.

These special acts of divine intervention into our human world could be contrasted with what some theologians call *general* revelation, a reference to God's created works in nature that are said to reveal Him in some way. But given conditions in our sinful world, this *general* revelation is so thoroughly ambiguous that many theologians refuse to call it revelation. For our purposes, in this chapter we are talking about *special* revelation.

A popular idea, one that I remember assuming to be true as I was growing up, is that all Scripture came by way of special revelation. That is a misconception, I've decided. We do refer to Scripture as "God's revealed Word." And in my mind's eye I can see preachers, both pastors and evangelists, holding the Bible aloft and speaking of God's "revelation" to

us. And there *is* a secondary sense in which the Bible, in the form that we have it, is revelation. But perhaps that very usage of the word explains why it has been so easy to assume that all Scripture came by way of *special* revelation.

It is correct to say, as the Bible itself does, that all Scripture is given by inspiration. But before we discuss inspiration, let us be perfectly clear about what we mean when we use the word "revelation." It may be the most crucial point in the whole book: *the Bible does not say that all Scripture was given by revelation.*

In Scripture, when a prophet says "The word of the Lord came to me" or "I saw," we know that we are dealing with revelation. But when the author of Kings tells us that the rest of Solomon's story can be found in the royal records, "the book of the acts of Solomon" (1 Kings 11:41); when the Chronicler refers us to the prophetic records of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (1 Chron. 29:29); and when Luke says that he researched the life of Christ so that he could put the record straight (Luke 1:1-4), we are dealing with Spirit-led research, *not* revelation in the technical sense. (See discussion in Chapter 12.)

I fully realize how jarring it is to imagine Luke shuffling a stack of 3 x 5 cards as he wrote his Gospel. In my head I still picture a prophet receiving a message from God as he gazes heavenward through a shaft of light. And that's a valid picture—until we generalize and try to make it fit *all* Scripture. When we read the Bible perceptively, we discover hints that enable us to know where revelation occurred and where it did not.

George Rice's book *Luke, a Plagiarist?* nicely describes the two basic ways in which Scripture came into being. The traditional model, based on revelation, is the one we have tended to impose on all Scripture. Rice uses the label *prophetic* to describe it. The other approach, based on research, is all too easily overlooked. Rice calls it the "Lucan model." To explain it, he links Luke's preamble (1:1-4) with a careful analysis of the entire Gospel. My students have found his discussion very helpful.

The terms *revelation* and *research* distinguish in a generic sense the two approaches. But a less sophisticated and fairly obvious example of material in Scripture that did *not* come by way of revelation is found in Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers. He simply tells the church outright that a report from the house of Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11) triggered his letter. Then he proceeds to summarize the sorry tale. If Paul could get his information from Chloe, it would seem appropriate that other inspired

writers might also find or receive information that did not come by way of special revelation.

Adventist history reveals deep roots for the misconception that all *inspired* messages come as a result of visions or some other form of special revelation. In one striking passage in *Testimonies for the Church* (1889), Ellen White addresses that issue in connection with her own ministry. Apparently her detractors were attempting to solve their "problems" with the testimonies by attributing some to visions (which they accepted) and others to hearsay (which they rejected).

Referring to her 45 years of experience, she responded with some passion: "Can I now be in the same ignorance, the same mental uncertainty and spiritual blindness, as at the beginning of this experience? Will my brethren say that Sister White has been so dull a scholar that her judgment in this direction is no better than before she entered Christ's school, to be trained and disciplined for a special work? . . .

"I would not dishonor my Maker," she exclaimed, "by admitting that all this light, all the display of His mighty power in my work and experience, has been valueless, that it has not educated my judgment or better fitted me for His work.

"When I see men and women taking the very course, or cherishing the very traits, which have imperiled other souls and wounded the cause of God, and which the Lord has reproved again and again, how can I but be alarmed? When I see timid souls, burdened with a sense of their imperfections, yet conscientiously striving to do what God has said is right, and know that the Lord looks down and smiles on their faithful efforts, shall I not speak a word of encouragement to these poor trembling hearts?"

Her conclusion clearly indicates that much of what she said did not have an *immediate* basis in revelation, but rather in her research of previous revelations: "Shall I hold my peace because each individual case has not been pointed out to me in direct vision?" (5T, pp. 685-687).

In short, prophetic messages can have full authority without necessarily being based on a specific supernatural revelation. Where Scripture claims revelation, let's accept it. But much of Scripture makes no such claim. We need to remember that when we study historical passages, psalms, proverbs, gospels, and epistles.

Inspiration? Always. Revelation? Sometimes—and most certainly when the Bible tells us so.

Inspiration: "A Fire in the Bones"

Regardless of how we may use the word "inspiration" in everyday conversation, it has a technical meaning when used in connection with Scripture. A sunset may be inspiring; a coach may inspire his team to produce an inspired performance; a pastor may preach an inspiring sermon. But all *that* is quite ordinary when compared with what Christians normally mean when they quote 2 Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (KJV).

To be sure, not all Christians understand the "inspiration" of 2 Timothy 3:16 in the same way. Taking the original Greek word *theopneustos* in its more literal sense as "God-breathed," some have used this passage to affirm verbal inspiration or even a dictation view of Scripture. Such was the position of François Gaussen, an outspoken nineteenth-century Swiss Protestant, in his book entitled *Theopneustia.*

His passionate arguments apparently left their mark on Adventism, too. According to Willie White, writing to LeRoy Froom in 1928, Adventists generally had held to a moderate "thought" view of inspiration. (See Appendix B.) But when W. W. Prescott, president of Battle Creek College, got his hands on Gaussen's *Theopneustia,* he adopted a more extreme view and forcefully presented it at the college. In the words of Willie White, "the acceptance of that view by the students in the Battle Creek College and many others, including Elder Haskell, has resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing" (3SM, p. 454).

Those "questions and perplexities" are rather subtle, but they become painfully clear if we look more closely at our Adventist history. At the Bible conference of 1919, Prescott gave others a glimpse into his own struggles with inspiration. He admits that he was shaken when Ellen White asked him to assist in revising the historical quotations in *The Great Controversy.* He ultimately took up the task, but not without significantly modifying his understanding of how inspiration functions.

Willie White also mentioned S. N. Haskell as one whom Prescott's Battle Creek presentations had influenced. Haskell's *Bible Handbook,* published in the same year as the Bible conference of 1919, certainly implies verbal inspiration. Referring to Daniel 10:17, 19, Haskell states, "Inspiration is God's breath, using the vocal organs of the prophet." Citing 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, he concludes: "All Scripture is thus inspired that man may know the way of life" (Haskell, p. 9).

If one adopts such a position, then inspiration becomes almost synon-

ymous with revelation. Or put another way, the inspiration process virtually becomes another form of revelation. The human recipient is viewed simply as the passive instrument through which the divine words flow.

Now there are instances in Scripture in which something close to dictation seems to be at work. Balaam's reluctant blessings on Israel (Num. 23. 24) and Caiaphas' unwitting prophecy that "one man should die for the people" (John 11:50) seem to fit into that category. John actually says that Caiaphas "did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation" (verse 51). But attempting to apply a dictation model consistently throughout Scripture would be inappropriate.

That such a sharp contrast has existed in Adventism between this dictation or "word" view of inspiration and Ellen White's "person" view is something I discovered quite by accident some years ago. Thanks to the teachers in the School of Theology at Walla Walla College, Ellen White's statements in *Selected Messages*, book 1, significantly shaped my own position on inspiration. I assumed that her views had been equally influential for the church in general. Not so.

One day while attempting the almost-impossible task of culling some books from my library, I picked up a little volume by Milton C. Wilcox, editor of *Signs of the Times* for nearly a quarter century (1891-1913). Entitled *Questions and Answers* (vol. 1), the book is a 1911 reprint of questions and answers published in *Signs*.

Opening the book at random, my eyes fell on question number 4, page 12. It dealt with inspiration. Startled by what I read, I quickly reached for *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 21, and read the more familiar words from Ellen White. So that you can sense what I felt and make your own comparisons, here are the two quotations with the key words italicized:

M. C. Wilcox (1911)

4. Where Is the Inspiration?
Which is inspired, the original Greek of the New Testament, or the English translation, or both?

The original words, of course; the words by which prophet and apostle spoke. *It was not the person who was inspired; it was the God-breathed*

E. G. White (1886 [published 1958])

The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial

Word. "All Scripture is [literally] God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). (Brackets supplied by Wilcox.)

in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.

Many nagging difficulties in the interpretation of Scripture are much more easily resolved if we can adopt the view that the *person* and not the *word* is inspired, that the Bible "is not God's mode of thought," and that "God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible." The implications of these key elements will become clearer in succeeding chapters.

While the sharp contrast between Wilcox's 1911 statement and Ellen White's 1886 statement is surprising to say the least, we have to recognize that apparently her 1886 statement was not published until 1958. And given the sharp conservative reaction to the discussion of inspiration at the 1919 Bible conference, it is perhaps not surprising that Ellen White's statement arguing for "person" and "thought" inspiration did not receive high priority and remained unpublished for many decades.

While a kindly Providence may have kept the 1886 manuscript out of sight because the church was not ready for it, the church has paid dearly for not taking better advantage of the insights on inspiration from the pen of Ellen White. Even though *Selected Messages* did not appear until 1958, the church still has had the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* available since 1888. Nevertheless, simply because something has been in print does not mean it will be taken seriously. After all, the Sabbath command has been "in print" in Scripture for centuries—yet how many

take it seriously, even among those who claim to keep it?

With reference to inspiration, we do not realize the treasure that we have in Ellen White's explicit statements. Time and again in recent years, when speaking on the topic of inspiration in local churches and especially those that have been torn apart by dissension on this topic, I hear the exclamation cropping up in the question-and-answer period, tinged both with exasperation and sadness, "Why has there been so much controversy when Ellen White makes it so plain?"

In the light of Ellen White's position, two significant questions present themselves: (1) How can we conceive of inspiration functioning so that it affects the person more than the words? and (2) How do writings from the pen of inspired authors differ from ordinary writings?

With reference to the first question, I like to think of Jeremiah's experience with the Word of God as a model for how God worked with the authors of Scripture. Regardless of when or whether revelation was involved, the Spirit still drove Jeremiah. A fire in his bones kept burning and wouldn't die. "If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,' there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot" (Jer. 20:9).

An inspired writer is one who is "fired up" to speak for God. Where does the message come from? From revelation, from research, from experience. Driven by the Spirit, the inspired writers see a need and must speak. But they use their own words, their own logic, and their own rhetoric regardless of how flawed their human tools may be. Often rough vocabulary, grammar, and logic "don't make no difference nohow! Ain't that true?" You get the message in spite of the linguistic massacre, right?

Similarly, God stays close enough to the writers so that the point comes through clear enough. A comparison from the college classroom can illustrate. For years the traditional way of marking an essay in first-year college writing was to give one grade for content and one for mechanics. Many a bright but careless student has been chagrined to receive back an essay marked A/D or A/F—excellent ideas, terrible form.

So it is with inspired writers. The quality of their literary endeavors varies in content and mechanics, though I would hasten to add that God never allows them to drop below the "pass" level, C-/C-.

Ironically, the A/A student may not always communicate the most effectively. Paul's complicated form and sophisticated logic may in fact miss the mark. Amos's earthy, almost embarrassingly plain language can be much more effective.

Imagine thrusting the same torch of fire (the Spirit) into two stacks of wood, one dry and the other wet. The dry stack will burn hot and clean, the wet one much more slowly and with smoke. But sometimes that slower fire is just right. So it is with biblical writers. Yes, we can grade them. We can say which ones are hotter, which ones are smokier. But in each case they are God's messengers with a fire in their bones.

In the classroom the most brilliant students do not always make the best teachers. In mathematics, for example, students who have struggled en route to mastery may become better teachers. Because they themselves know what it is like to fall into the miry pit, they know how to point the way home. Similarly, an A/A prophet may not always be just what God needs. One who ranks C/A, B/B, or even A/C may be the better choice under certain circumstances. God matches the need with the messenger and lights a fire in the bones.

A naughty little story making the rounds about graduates from medical school illustrates the same principle: the top third of the class make the best research doctors, the middle third make the best family doctors, and the bottom third make the most money!

If grading the prophets makes you uneasy, if you have felt guilty about preferring one part of the Bible over other parts or about neglecting some parts of Scripture almost entirely, then Ellen White's statement in the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* may help you as it helped me. I have italicized the crucial words:

"Written in different ages *by men who differed widely* in rank and occupation, *and in mental and spiritual endowments*, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; *often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another*. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony" (GC, p. vi).

If the prophets vary in "mental and spiritual endowments" (their mastery of the mechanics and the quality of their relationship with God), and if some present truth "more strikingly" than others (their ability to write in an appealing literary style or form) are we not then grading them, at least subconsciously? They are still prophets and still authorita-

tive. But it's all right to say that Paul writes more clearly than John, or vice versa.

We are moving now in the direction of the second question: How do writings from the pen of inspired authors differ from ordinary writings? In some ways, not at all. In both we find human words, human logic, human rhetoric.

A good friend of mine told me how he once selected a passage for family worship from Ecclesiasticus, a noncanonical book from the Protestant Apocrypha (not to be confused with the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes). After his son had read the passage, my friend raised the question about the authority of what they had just read. Did they recognize it as Scripture? The book is very much like our biblical book of Proverbs, and I dare say that most of us would have a hard time picking out the biblical proverbs from the nonbiblical ones if someone were to type up the individual sayings from both sources and toss them in a heap. In both books the words, logic, and rhetoric are human. What, then, makes Proverbs different from Ecclesiasticus?

Perhaps we can illustrate the difference between the writings of inspired authors and ordinary ones by drawing a parallel with certain classic cases of hidden or mistaken identity. Remember the story of the rude train conductor who insulted a wizened old passenger, only to learn later that the old man was chairman of the board?

I well remember my chagrin—and change in attitude—when I discovered that I had wrongly identified the author of a critique of an article I had written. I had been inclined to disregard the criticisms, maybe even to consider them a trifle amusing. But when I discovered that the author was someone I greatly admired, my whole attitude changed.

So let me suggest that inspiration has a special meaning when applied to Scripture. It is our way of saying that these books have been written by God's messengers, handed down by God's people, and delivered to us—God's modern people—as the Word of God. And through it all, the Holy Spirit has been present in a special way. We cannot prove that special presence. But we do accept it on the testimony of those who have lived before us. And just as my whole attitude changed when I discovered who really wrote the critique I was taking too lightly, so my attitude changes when I pick up Scripture and tell myself that this Book is the result of inspiration.

The mysterious power of the psalm I have been memorizing is somehow linked with my conviction that the Holy Spirit inspired this

passage. A letter can be ordinary words until we discover that a dear friend wrote it. Suddenly, all kinds of exciting things begin to happen.

Two further observations about inspired writings would be appropriate to mention right here. First, the word "inspired" does not necessarily mean immediately helpful. C. S. Lewis or Paul Tournier may be more meaningful in my life at particular times than parts of Numbers, Chronicles, Nahum, or even Jude. But that does not mean that I will clip out Nahum and paste in Lewis. It's much too late for that. Lewis may be more inspiring at times to some modern readers. But he is not inspired.

Second, the adjective "inspired" does not mean immediately relevant. Many of the laws given in both Testaments do not apply directly to our day. Studying them can be extremely helpful in deriving certain principles that are applicable to us, but that requires a translation process. That's why a commentary on a biblical book is sometimes more helpful than the biblical book taken by itself.

But still, this Book is a letter from a Friend. Sometimes that letter jumps directly into our daily experience. Sometimes we treat it as we would a page from Great-great-grandfather's expense book: intriguing, precious—maybe instructive—but probably not immediately relevant. That doesn't mean, however, that we have to throw it away.

Illumination: "A Great Idea"

If we establish that inspiration as it applies to Scripture is simply a means of indicating that the Holy Spirit has been active in a special way, then the concept of illumination simply indicates how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of ordinary mortals. Unless an author has earned his or her prophetic spurs, so to speak, even though he or she may be very inspiring as a writer or speaker, we would have to say that such a person has experienced illumination, not inspiration in the more precise sense. The Holy Spirit can plant great ideas in the hearts of human beings, but such great ideas may have nothing to do with inspiration in the biblical sense. Scripture was given by inspiration of God. The writers had a special calling, even if their writings look like those of ordinary mortals. For all the rest of us, "illumination" is the right word to use.

To sum up our more technical use of the terms, we can say that illumination comes to all people everywhere, but not revelation and not inspiration. All Scripture came by way of inspiration, though not necessarily by revelation, even if all Scripture becomes revelation to us in a secondary sense. But since the writings of some inspired messengers were

not included in Scripture, even though they received revelations, we face another tantalizing question: Why these books in Scripture and not others? That is a matter of the canon, the topic of our next chapter. But first a summary of terms:

Revelation? A visible or audible intervention by God ("a vision").

Inspiration? The Spirit's special urging of a messenger to speak or write ("a fire in the bones").

Illumination? Enlightenment given by the Holy Spirit to ordinary people ("a great idea").

Now we can turn to the matter of canon in our next chapter and seek to understand why some "strange" books are part of Scripture and why some "good" books are not.

CHAPTER
THREE

The Canon: Which Books Belong in Our Bible?

This is a mean question," I warn my class. "But suppose a team of archaeologists in the Middle East unearthed an ancient manuscript. Experts conclude that the apostle Paul wrote it as a letter to the church at Corinth, a letter different from the two we now have in the New Testament. The question is: Would you include this additional letter in your Bible?"

"Of course!" some reply quickly. "If Paul really wrote it, why not?"

"Wait a minute," others caution as they begin to think it through. "Just because Paul wrote it doesn't necessarily mean that it belongs in the Bible. Or does it?"

That question always prompts a good discussion about the nature of Scripture and its authority in our lives. "The Bible and the Bible only" is a powerful slogan, but behind it lurk significant questions that thoughtful Christians should ponder and discuss:

Canon: Why these particular books?

Manuscripts: What does it mean when two or more manuscripts of the same biblical book do not agree?

Translations: Are modern translations safe?

In the next three chapters we will probe these questions. As we do so, however, we should remind ourselves that God's ways are both simple and complex. Sometimes He multiplies words; sometimes He is silent. When we yearn to understand His will, we might think that more is better (the nine volumes of the *Testimonies*, perhaps?). But less can also be adequate. The same author of the voluminous nine volumes also spoke reassuringly

of "those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet [who] will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature. . . . Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts" (DA, p. 638).

While we dare not shirk our responsibility to tackle the hard questions, it is helpful to recognize that a beautiful simplicity shines through the complexity of it all. Ellen White once summarized the essence of God's message in terms of John 3:16, exclaiming: "If one had no other text in the Bible, this alone would be a guide for the soul" (TM, p. 370).

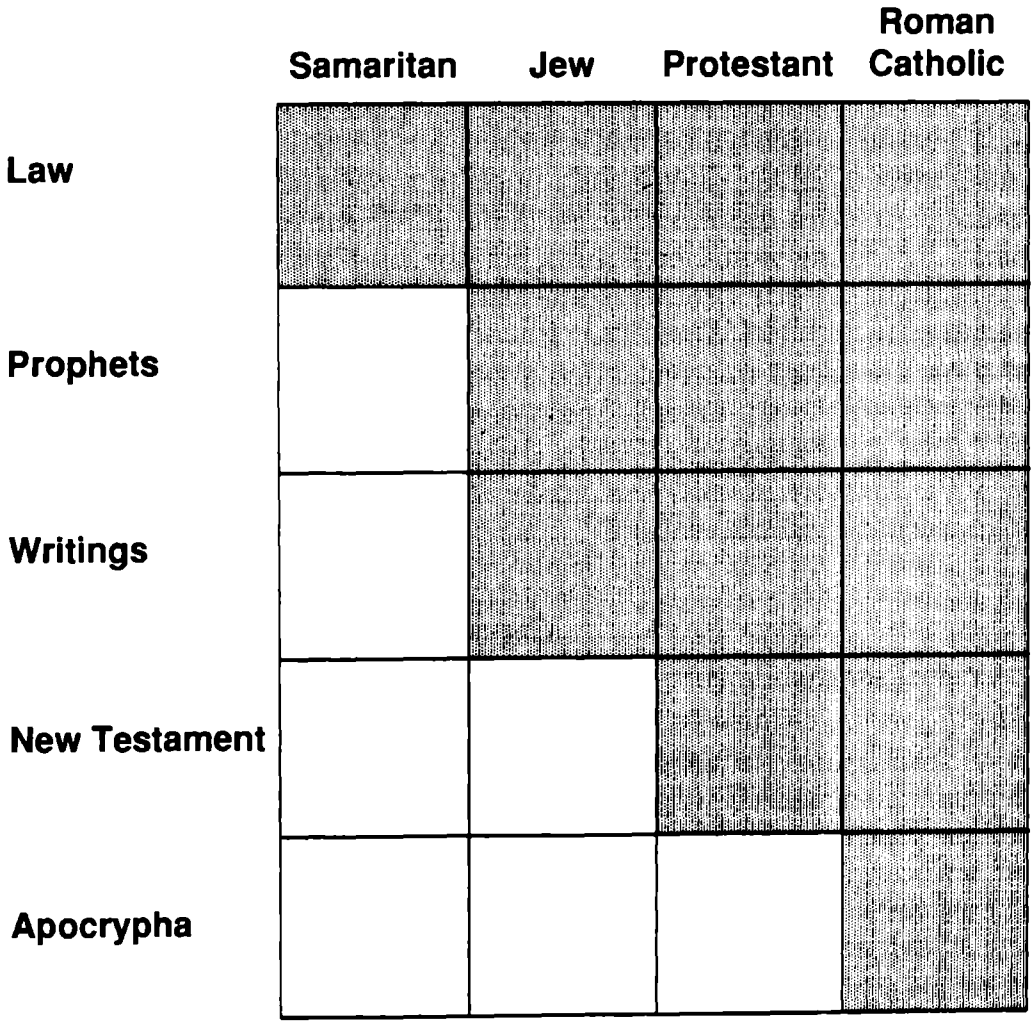
Millions of our brothers and sisters in Christ have found life and healing through His Word. That is worth remembering when the collapse of some cherished misconception about His Word threatens to bring our faith crashing down, as well. Some mysteries we will never penetrate. But if "Christ can be best glorified by those who serve Him intelligently" (3T, p. 160), then we should seek to be intelligent about matters of canon, manuscripts, and translations.

Canon

Our English word "canon" comes to us from a Greek word with Semitic roots. Originally it referred to a straight reed that could be used as a measure or standard. As applied to Scripture, it refers to a clearly defined set of sacred writings that a community of believers holds as a standard or rule of faith. Canon often plays a significant role in marking off one community of believers from another. Samaritans, for example, accept only the Law of Moses as Scripture; whereas Jews accept two additional groups of books, the Prophets and the Writings. Protestants and Roman Catholics include all that the Jews accept plus the New Testament books. Roman Catholics, however, move beyond Protestants and accept the Apocrypha as part of Scripture, but designating the books as "deuterocanonical," that is, belonging to a "second canon." The accompanying chart on page 60 illustrates the differences.

Attitudes toward "canon" vary from community to community. Jews, for example, view the Law of Moses as *the* authority, with the Prophets a notch lower and the Writings lower still. In theory, Protestants grant all Scripture equal authority, though in practice, some books are often held in higher esteem, giving rise to the expression "canon within the canon." Traditionally, Roman Catholics have diminished the authority of Scripture by granting the Church the right of final interpreter.

Canons Compared



Adventists accept the Protestant canon. That means we have more books in our Bible than either the Samaritans or Jews would accept, but fewer than those held by Roman Catholics. How did these differences develop? By usage, with final decisions sometimes triggered by key events.

And how can we know which canon is correct? The answer to that question is both simple and complex. We will discuss some of the

complexities below. The simple part, however, is embodied in one important principle: *The Spirit guides the community to establish by usage the canon of Scripture.* Yes, God can and does guide the community. Indeed. He must. As believers we are convinced that God, through His Spirit, guides the entire process that brings the power of Scripture to bear on our lives. We can summarize the key steps in that process, incorporating important aspects from our discussion thus far:

1. *GOD reveals* Himself to a messenger.
2. *GOD inspires* the messenger to share orally or in writing, and to augment *revelation* with *research* when appropriate.
3. *GOD guides* the community to accept the messenger as a *credentialed prophet* and his or her words as an *authoritative message.*
4. *GOD guides* the community over time to select some, but by no means all, of these authoritative messages as *the canon of Scripture,* a permanent standard and guide for the community.
5. *GOD guides* the individual members of the community to read and apply His Word in their lives.

For the believer, God is master at every step. Even though the process could seem very human, very natural, the eye of faith insists that God's hand guides throughout. Perhaps we could draw a comparison with the wind that divided the Red Sea so that Israel could cross over. In the first instance, wind is "natural." That was all the Egyptians saw when they plunged into the sea after Israel. But the eye of faith saw a stronger hand: "The *Lord* drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night" (Ex. 14:21). Expressed in poetry, the conviction of God's involvement becomes even more vivid and His involvement more personal. The believers caught a glimpse of God drawing a deep breath, and they exclaimed: "At the blast of thy nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea" (Ex. 15:8).

When it comes to the canonization process, it is important for believers to see more than the natural process. If we can see the "blast from God's nostrils," so much the better. As I listen carefully to our Adventist conversations, I seldom sense any uneasiness about God's involvement in the initial steps of the canonization process, those dealing more directly with revelation and inspiration. But I get the distinct impression that we would rather avoid thinking about those steps that recognize God's guidance *in and through the community* (Nos. 3 and 4 above). And that is where the question posed at the beginning of this chapter is important, for it encourages us to think about the process.

It is not an idle question to ask: "Would you add to your Bible a newly discovered Pauline letter?" After all, Roman Catholics do have the Apocrypha as an "extra" in their Bibles. Mormons, too, include additional books: *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price* are all bound up together with a King James Version of the Bible, India paper and leather binding included. Would Adventists do the same with an extra letter of Paul? With select writings from the pen of Ellen White?

To be sure, we could vote to include an extra letter or extra books. But that would set us apart as a new community, a community that has parted company with its Protestant heritage. "The Bible and the Bible only" would then mean something quite different for us. Although we believe that God can speak through other voices, even inspired ones, we should not let those voices speak from within the canon of Scripture.

The Introduction to *The Great Controversy* makes some forceful statements about canon. While developing the argument that God speaks to us through many voices, not just through Scripture, Ellen White emphasizes that Scripture is first, foremost, and distinct. Throughout the biblical era the Spirit continued to communicate messages "apart from the revelations to be embodied in the Sacred Canon." These messages "in no way [related] to the giving of the Scriptures. . . . After the close of the canon of Scripture," this work of the Spirit was to continue. The promises of Jesus in that respect "extend to the church of Christ in all ages" (GC, p. viii).

Other voices? Yes. In Scripture? No.

The canon of Scripture is something special that is given us by God as a standard by which we judge all other voices. As we look at the history of the development of canon, we will find mysteries and gray areas. But believers are convinced that God was and is the master of the entire process. That is the only way His Word can accomplish its desired end in our lives.

Canon: A Touch of History

When we compare our Protestant canon with those of other communities, we inevitably turn to history for explanations of how it happened. Tracing that history is a tantalizing and frustrating task because the evidence is so spotty, especially for the Old Testament. But certain highlights are worth noting.

Development of the Old Testament Canon—The most direct reference to canon in Scripture is found in Luke 24:44. In connection with the prophecies concerning Himself, Jesus mentions Law, Prophets, and Psalms. a reference to the three sections of the Hebrew Bible (Psalms being the first and largest book of the third section, the Writings). For most scholars this verse implies that the Hebrew canon had been fully established by Jesus' day.

After a book is written, centuries can pass before it becomes fully canonical. When the Jews and Samaritans parted company, for example, apparently only the five books of the Law of Moses had attained canonical status. Rebuffed by the Jews in their offer to assist in rebuilding the Temple (ca.536-515 B.C.; see Ezra 4), the Samaritans went their own way. Even though many books in the Prophets and in the Writings had been in usage for centuries, Samaritans never accepted them as Scripture. The split took place before these inspired writings became accepted as fully canonical.

Just how these books finally found a place in the canon is not clear. Whether in Scripture or elsewhere, hardly a trace of evidence remains to illuminate the process. All we know is that by Jesus' day the canon was complete: the Hebrew Scriptures consisted of Law, Prophets, and Writings. With changes only in some titles and internal organization as noted below, the Hebrew Scriptures still constitute the Christian Old Testament:

Law: the five books of Moses, also known as the Pentateuch.

Prophets: by Hebrew reckoning a total of eight books divided into two sections: the *Former Prophets*, consisting of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (double books are listed as one); and the *Latter Prophets*, consisting of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (all of the so-called minor prophets considered together as one book).

Writings: the remaining 11 books of our Old Testament, by Hebrew reckoning, counting both Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles as single books. Interestingly enough, Daniel is included in this section probably because it is largely apocalyptic, a different kind of prophecy from that found in the classical prophetic books.

Although most scholars would hold that the Hebrew Bible was complete by Jesus' day, some books in the canon met with more ready acceptance than others. Jewish sources record rabbinical discussions on the topic from the end of the first century A.D., sometimes linked with a so-called Council of Jamnia in A.D. 90, though it is doubtful whether such a council actually convened. In any event, the written record suggests that the rabbis were not attempting to decide which books to include, but

simply were expressing perplexities over some of those already in the canon. For example, Ecclesiastes came under fire for being too pessimistic, Song of Songs for being too intimate, Ezekiel for seeming to be contradictory.

But while questions surfaced, the prevailing sentiment was to keep the canon intact. When the Song of Songs came under attack, for example, a rabbi defended it passionately as the holiest of all books. Another rabbi rose to the defense of Ezekiel, claiming that he had resolved all the apparent "contradictions"—at the cost of 300 bottles of (midnight?) oil!

The Development of the New Testament Canon—The three-part Hebrew canon was "Bible" for Jesus and the apostles, too. They were, after all, Jews. And it was their only Bible. That shared canon explains why the apostles kept citing Scripture as authority in their appeals to Jews. "Jesus," they urged, "is our Jewish Messiah (anointed one). Look, it says so right here in the Scripture!"

The Jewish community was divided over this crucial issue of whether Jesus really was the promised "anointed one." (*Messiah* and *Christ* both mean "anointed one." *Messiah* is a transliteration based on a Hebrew word; *Christ* comes from the Greek.) Those who said no remained Jews. Those who said yes became known as Christians. While continuing to accept the Hebrew Scriptures as canonical, these Christians also accepted the words of Jesus as a message from God. In time the words of the evangelists and apostles also became authoritative. Thus as the years passed, the New Testament was born. Ultimately an addition of 27 more books to the canon, it was accepted only by the new Christian community, not by the old Jewish one.

Although the canonization process for both Testaments took time (something we can say with reasonable certainty even with the little evidence we have), it is the history of the New Testament that has blessed us with evidence for how the process of canonization works. Some books "struggled" for acceptance, so to speak, including the Gospel of John, Hebrews, Second Peter, Second and Third John, and Revelation. Evidence for apostolic authorship seems to have been a key factor contributing to a book's acceptance into the canon.

Just how much time was required is suggested by the fact that the first complete list of the 27 New Testament books as we have them today, no more and no less, dates from 367. In that year Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, sent out an Easter letter in which he listed the books in the New Testament canon. Although questions still lingered and debates

continued in parts of the Christian world, the Spirit guided until the 27 books of our New Testament were in place. The process took some 300 years until it was complete.

The Apocrypha—Turning now to the Apocrypha, the extra writings accepted by Roman Catholics, we can glean additional insights into the process of canonization, even though these books do not form part of our Protestant canon.

The historical factors that led Protestants and Catholics to accept different canons are rooted in the early Christian Era. At the outset we should note that the term *Apocrypha* is an unhappy one since it suggests something like "spurious" or "heretical." (See Appendix C.) Originally, however, the writings now carrying the label Apocrypha were quite ordinary Jewish books, generally similar in style and scope to books in Scripture. Additional stories, prayers, and homilies, for example, were added to Daniel and Esther; First and Second Maccabees are similar in style and content to Kings and Chronicles; Ecclesiasticus is a wisdom book like Proverbs.

Regardless of whether or not one accepts these books as canonical, they provide valuable insights into the history of Judaism during the so-called intertestamental period, that wedge of time extending from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah until the New Testament picks up the story again with Jesus. Furthermore, many early Christians valued these books as a source of devotional reading, even though the authors were Jewish, not Christian.

The early history of the Apocrypha is linked closely with the growth of the Jewish *Dispersion* or *Diaspora*, the scattering of Jewish communities outside Palestine as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem (586 B.C.) and the exile of many leading Jews to Babylon. While a trickle of Jews returned to Palestine in 536 B.C. with Zerubbabel or later with Ezra (457 B.C.) or Nehemiah (444 B.C.), many chose to stay in Babylon. Others migrated to points outside Palestine. By the time of Christ, large Jewish communities had settled in key metropolitan centers throughout the Greco-Roman Empire. For most Jews of the Dispersion, Greek overwhelmed Hebrew as the language of preference, and a Greek translation of Scripture, the Septuagint (LXX), took precedence over the original Hebrew Bible. It was in conjunction with the Septuagint that the writings later to be known as the Apocrypha found a home.

Christians ended up preferring the Septuagint over the Hebrew Scriptures, too, not only because they found Greek easier to read and

understand than Hebrew but also because some of the best Christian "proof" texts came from the Septuagint.

As Christian evangelists hammered away at the Jewish fortress, using the Jews' own Septuagint as one of their chief weapons, Jews who wished to remain Jews turned to other Greek translations, leaving the Septuagint to the Christians. Thus Christians, not Jews, circulated and preserved the Septuagint in those early centuries. Additionally, the Septuagint included the Apocrypha. Since Christians preferred the book format (codex) to the scroll, the Apocrypha slipped more easily into church along with the Septuagint. (In a scroll format, books circulated one by one; in a codex, many books were bound together in one volume.)

A key argument for including the Apocrypha within the Christian canon lies in the fact that the different writings were not clustered together between the Testaments (as they would be later under the influence of the Reformers), but actually were interspersed among the Old Testament books in the Septuagint. That pattern of organization is still followed in Roman Catholic Bibles.

Informed Christian scholars, however, even in the early Catholic tradition, recognized that these extra books did not hold the same canonical status as the Hebrew Scriptures. Although Origen (died 254) accepted these books as Scripture for himself, he recognized that this view was not generally held. Thus, in his scholarly work, he limited the Old Testament to the books of the Hebrew Bible. Cyril of Jerusalem (died 386) and Jerome (died 420) distinguished even more sharply between these extra books and the Hebrew canon. Jerome went so far as to say publicly that these extra books could be used for edification, but not "for confirming the authority of church dogmas" (1IDB, p. 164). Nevertheless, the continued use of the Apocrypha in the Catholic tradition gradually moved it toward canonical status and forced Jerome, contrary to his own convictions, to include the Apocrypha in his translation of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate, the version destined to become the official Roman Catholic Bible. Augustine (died 430) lent powerful support to the church view by accepting the Apocrypha as canonical, though he too, in his later writings, admitted a distinction between the books of the Hebrew canon and the "outside books" (1IDB, p. 164).

Throughout the medieval period, Augustine's positive view of the Apocrypha dominated, though a persistent line of scholars continued to argue that Jerome was correct. The Reformers sided with Jerome and took

steps toward demoting the Apocrypha, their convictions strengthened by the fact that a number of unacceptable Roman Catholic teachings (e.g., prayers for the dead) found support in the Apocrypha.

Wycliffe's English translation did not include the Apocrypha. And though Luther retained the apocryphal books in his German translation, he moved them to a separate section between the Testaments, a practice followed by most of the Reformation Bibles. By 1626 some copies of the King James Version began to appear without the Apocrypha. Finally, in 1827 both the British and American Bible Societies announced that henceforth they would "exclude in their printed copies of the English Bible the circulation of those books, or parts of books, which are usually termed apocryphal" (1IBD, p. 165).

In reaction to the Reformers' efforts to demote the Apocrypha, Roman Catholics moved in the opposite direction and affirmed full canonical status. The Council of Trent (1546) declared that whoever did not recognize as sacred and canonical all the books contained in the Vulgate would be anathema, a decision affirmed by the Vatican Council of 1870.

One last note should be added about the history of the canon among Adventists. In one of the very early Adventist tracts, "A Word to the 'Little Flock' " (1846), James White included some references from the Protestant Apocrypha in the footnotes when he gave the scriptural references to one of Ellen White's visions. The Whites may have been using a Bible published before the Bible Societies eliminated the Apocrypha from their versions in 1827. Additionally, the August 5, 1851, edition of the *Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* carried a notice that E. L. Chamberlain had 50 copies of a pocket edition of the Apocrypha that he would mail to those who sent him 25 cents (p. 8).

But whatever may have been the reasons for the apparent acceptance of the Apocrypha in early Adventism, the Whites seemed to have moved very early to the standard Protestant canon and held to it consistently thereafter. This remains the Adventist position today.

Canon: A Summary

Most of us would find it difficult to sit down with various books, canonical and noncanonical, and determine on the basis of our own opinion which ones belong in the canon and which ones do not. Left solely to our own devices, we could easily come to wrong conclusions.

While God could choose to guide us individually, the canon is one area in which He has chosen to guide the community of believers as a whole. Thus, we listen carefully to those who have gone before and affirm that the Spirit has guided them. We accept *their* decision and *their* Bible as *our* decision and *our* Bible.

This, then, is the Book that guides our lives today.

CHAPTER
FOUR

Manuscripts: What if Something Important Is Missing?

One of the reasons Scripture exerts such a powerful influence on our thinking is its familiarity. With each repetition, words etch themselves deeper and deeper into mind and heart. Even the use of a particular printed edition has a similar impact on us. I find myself very reluctant to switch from an old Bible to a new one, even if the old one is virtually worn out. That old one "knows" where my favorite verses are. Eyes and fingers slip almost automatically not just to the right page but also to the right spot on the page.

So I have to struggle with a touch of exasperation when I pick up a modern translation and find part of my Bible "missing." Usually I can find the orphan tucked away in a footnote with the comment "Other ancient authorities read . . ." But why didn't God standardize the manuscripts so that they would all read the same? The omissions and differences are aggravating to say the least. For some they are downright frightening.

When we discuss parallel passages we will deal with the issue of "differences" more thoroughly. Indeed, reading the Synoptic Gospels or comparing Samuel-Kings with Chronicles can provide a good testing ground for us. There we can struggle with manuscripts that are not the same—until we make peace with the way God's Word actually is. Telling God how He should have done it will not change the Bible. It is too late for that. We have to live with it as it is.

When it comes to differences in manuscripts or in parallel passages, I have found myself talking out of both sides of my mouth. On the one hand, I will argue that an individual word is terribly important and makes a great

deal of difference in the meaning of the text. That is very true. At the same time, however, I will argue that even a generous sprinkling of human "imperfections" in the text need not keep the message from coming through loud and clear. That is also true. So how do we bring the two truths together?

Maybe we could draw a comparison with the expectations I have when I take my car into the shop for repairs. On the one hand, I want the mechanic to be precise, using electronic equipment where appropriate to make pinpoint adjustments. But given my limited knowledge of mechanical matters, I may very well just tell the mechanic: "I don't care what you do. Just make the thing run." In an emergency a skilled mechanic can rig up all kinds of substitutes to "make the thing run." And I would be quite annoyed if he refused to help me simply because he did not have access to genuine General Motors parts. A good mechanic is prepared to adapt to circumstances.

And so it is with God's Word. Arguing consistently for absolute precision can make us so rigid that we become incapable of dealing with the varied human needs in our world. Precision is important; practicality even more so. Practicality sometimes calls for absolute precision, sometimes for rough approximation. In the very context of discussing the human imperfections in Scripture, Ellen White declared: "The Bible was given for practical purposes" (1SM, p. 20).

I have suspected that one practical purpose for allowing the differences in parallel passages may be to give us a subtle clue that those are the kinds of things not worth quarreling over! In short, I can almost see the serious twinkle in God's eye as He allows two authors to tell the same story in different ways, permits an absent-minded copyist to drop a word out of a biblical manuscript, or lets a well-intentioned scribe slip in an additional phrase.

Let us not make the matter any worse than it is, to be sure. But we should be honest enough to recognize the nature of Scripture as it is. We must learn to live with it in the form God has given it to us, not in the way we might have wanted it to come.

To illustrate how differences in manuscripts can affect us, we will look at three examples from Scripture and put them into perspective: (1) the concluding doxology in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6), (2) the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8), and (3) a proof text for the Trinity called the "Johannine comma" (1 John 5). All three examples are firmly in place in the King James Version. But because of manuscript evidence, all

three have slipped either into the footnotes or out of sight in most modern translations.

The Lord's Prayer

(Matthew 6:9-13)

If you were raised in a Christian home, you most certainly memorized the Lord's Prayer, including the phrase "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen." But no matter how many of us have memorized this doxology, it is missing from the oldest and best manuscripts and therefore has been relegated to the footnotes in most modern translations. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4) also omits it.

Did Jesus originally utter the prayer with the doxology? Not according to the most ancient manuscripts.

Will we teach our children the Lord's Prayer without it? Probably not.

Is it wrong to include it? No—even if it did not originally belong to Jesus' prayer. There is nothing wrong with the doxology itself. Indeed, its language is drawn from 1 Chronicles 29:10, 11, David's consecration prayer when the people brought gifts for the building of the Temple. Somehow, somewhere, someone added this biblical prayer to Jesus' prayer. My guess is that it will be with us forever, even if it did not originate at the same time as the rest of the Lord's Prayer.

Is it wrong to leave it out? No. But you would have a hard time doing so. You would always be out of step with anyone who has memorized the Lord's Prayer.

What should we do about it? Not much—except to learn to live with modern translations that put these words in a footnote.

My mind tells me clearly that the doxology does not belong with the prayer. But my heart and my habits keep it there. I simply have to learn to live with that awkward state of affairs.

The Woman Taken in Adultery

(John 7:53-8:11)

The story of the woman taken in adultery is one of the most moving in Scripture. Priestly schemers had trapped a woman *in the very act* of adultery and had dragged her to Jesus for a verdict. Their motives were evil. They were using her to attack Him.

According to the Old Testament, stoning was the appropriate punishment for adultery. But to the accusers Jesus said: "Let him who is without

sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." One by one they all slipped away. Jesus and the woman stood alone. "Where are they?" He asked her. "Has no one condemned you?"

She answered, "No one, Lord."

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go and do not sin anymore."

It is a beautiful story of forgiveness and renewal. So why does the 1946 edition of the Revised Standard Version put it all in the footnotes? Did the RSV translators not believe in forgiveness?

We can safely plead "not guilty" on behalf of the RSV translators, at least as far as their view on forgiveness is concerned. The reason for the omission has to do with the ancient manuscripts. But surprisingly, attitudes toward forgiveness may explain what we find in those manuscripts and thus help us understand why the story now appears in the footnotes in some modern translations.

There are several intriguing pieces to the puzzle. Of particular interest is one crucial group of manuscripts called the uncials, so named because they were written in all capital letters. (The Latin word *uncialis* meant "an inch high," and so came to refer to large letters—capital letters.) The earliest uncial manuscripts date from the fourth to the sixth century A.D. and are the basis for our New Testament text.

This story, however, appears in only one of the uncials, and that one is not considered among the best. Six manuscripts omit it completely without explanation; two more leave a blank space where it is supposed to appear. Only when we come to the late Greek and medieval manuscripts do we find it, and even then it is often marked as a doubtful passage.

Another feature of the textual history of the story is that it floats to various places in the New Testament. In some manuscripts it appears at the end of John; in others it is inserted after Luke 21:38. Since its language and vocabulary set it apart from the rest of the Gospel of John, most scholars believe that it was not originally part of his Gospel.

All these facts explain why the RSV translators moved the story to the footnotes. But another kind of evidence points us toward a happier solution. As we probe the Church Fathers, we find evidence that they knew the story. Jerome (died 420) did, for he included it in his Latin Vulgate translation. Both Ambrose (died 397) and Augustine (died 430) knew about the story, for they commented on it. And while the story is not found in the great uncials, it can be traced back to the early second century. The Apostolic Constitutions include it as a warning to bishops not to be too strict. And according to church historian Eusebius (died 340), Papias (died

130) told the story of a "woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord" (Barclay, p. 291).

To sum up, there is solid evidence that the story really happened, even if its exact location in the New Testament is not certain. But the crucial question remains: Why did the great uncials not include it?

Augustine helps us as much as any, for he notes that the story was removed from the original text of the Gospel because "some were of slight faith" and "to avoid scandal." It seems as though some saw the story as encouraging a careless attitude toward adultery. After all, the Christian church was fighting for its life in the midst of a pagan culture that placed little or no value on chastity. Some who copied the New Testament apparently feared that the story's emphasis on forgiveness could cause new converts to fall back into old ways. Thus they omitted it.

Interestingly enough, newer editions of the RSV, including the New Revised Standard Version (1989), have moved the story from the footnotes back into the main text. Candid scholarly opinion along with church practice have given the story life. That's good. In one sense we would all feel better if it had a firm home in Scripture, with solid textual evidence to back it up. But the arguments in favor are more subtle than that. And the realization that the story almost slipped away from the church entirely may make it more precious in the end.

The Johannine Comma

(1 John 5:7, 8)

The expression "Johannine comma" refers to a portion of 1 John 5:7, 8 that appears in the King James Version as a proof text for the doctrine of the Trinity. The question is not whether the disputed portion is true, but whether it belongs in Scripture. As cited here, the "comma" appears in italics and in brackets: "For there are three that bear record *[in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth,]* the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."

The history of the "comma" sounds like a cloak-and-dagger tale of sorts. In the Greek tradition it appears in only two fourteenth-century manuscripts and as a seventeenth-century marginal comment (gloss) in a twelfth-century manuscript. Its first known occurrence in any language is in 380 in the writings of Priscillian, a Latin author. From there it made its way into the Latin Bibles.

With such a weak pedigree, how did it end up in the King James

Version? That is where the story gets interesting. An uproar over the "comma" broke out when Erasmus produced his first "critical" edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516. Erasmus knew of the "comma" from the Latin manuscript tradition, but failing to find it in any of his Greek manuscripts, he naturally elected to leave it out of his Greek text.

Church authorities were irate. How could Greek overrule the Latin? Never mind that the New Testament was written in Greek; Latin was now the official church language. Leading churchmen told Erasmus that any Greek manuscript that did not contain the same text as the Latin would have to be rejected.

In a rash moment Erasmus promised his detractors that if they could produce even so much as *one* Greek manuscript with the "comma" in it, he would add the disputed text into his next edition. Surprise! Just such a manuscript showed up in Dublin, a manuscript now recognized as a translation of the Latin *back into* Greek.

Erasmus winced, but kept his promise and introduced the "comma" into the third edition of his New Testament text in 1522. This third edition became the "received text" (textus receptus) upon which the King James Version was based. And that is how the verse has come down to us.

Without judging the truth or error of the "comma," we can recognize that textual evidence alone overwhelmingly supports Erasmus' original decision not to include the passage in his Greek New Testament. But church tradition prevailed and kept the "comma" alive. The textual evidence is so late and so thin that some modern translations omit the "comma" without even the courtesy of a footnote.

We may believe the "comma" to be perfectly true. But that is not the point. It simply does not belong in 1 John 5. Nor does the doctrine of the Trinity need the "comma" for support. It can stand quite nicely without it.

Manuscripts: A Summary

Looking back at these three examples of manuscript variations, we find a stately doxology, a beautiful story, and a proof text for the Trinity. All the variations are innocent enough. In the case of the doxology, we are firmly attached to the passage, even when we know it does not belong with the Lord's Prayer. Similarly, the story of the woman taken in adultery is with us to stay. Even though it probably did not originate as part of John's Gospel, a strong argument can be made that it was a genuine incident in Jesus' life. The Trinity proof text from 1 John 5 is the one most likely to be left behind. Yet even there, the force of the King James Version has

tended to keep it in circulation, even while other versions are omitting it without comment.

Given the cumulative effect of manuscript variations, it is understandable that conservative believers tend to gravitate toward a translation of Scripture that will keep the disputed passages in place. The force of habit is strong.

As long as our habits are properly informed, we certainly may elect to keep disputed passages such as the doxology in the Lord's Prayer. What we want to avoid is the possibility of a deadly surprise. Why should we allow such an obvious feature of the history of our Bible to shake our faith? It does not need to happen. That is why the next chapter takes a closer look at translations.

CHAPTER
FIVE

Translations: Are They Safe?

If you use any translation other than the King James Version, you could lose your faith."

Class was over. All the students had left except one. He continued to sit at his desk, gazing out the window. I could tell he felt troubled. We talked. That's when he told me about the somber warning that had been delivered to him by one of the saints regarding the use of the King James Version.

"Is it true?" he asked. He turned and gazed out the window again.

Fear. Fear that a change in a word or a phrase could destroy one's most precious possession, faith in God. I have heard it. I have seen it written on blanched faces and white knuckles. It seems so unnecessary. But a cheerful shrug affords no help for the blanched face and white knuckles. We must do more.

At the root of it all, I suspect, is a fear of change, change where we want it least, in God and His Word. And while I consider that earnest warning against other translations to be unnecessary—even tragic, because it so easily can become a self-fulfilling prophecy—still it reflects a measure of genuine perception.

Those who fear translation recognize, however unconsciously, that translation *does* involve—unavoidably, I might add—interpretation and commentary. And so it opens the door to change. If you do not want change, do not translate.

Muslims, for example, accept no official translations of the Koran. Any attempt to translate is strictly unofficial. Only the Arabic original is sacred. Without a knowledge of Arabic, you can never know the *real* Koran.

But people change and language changes. If no one translates the Word of God, how can it touch the hearts of human beings? Great revivals of the past were nourished into a robust reality because God sent messengers to translate His Word into the language of the people.

The Reformer Wycliffe dared to translate God's Word into English for the common people, declaring, "No man was so rude a scholar but that he might learn the words of the Gospel according to his simplicity." "It helpeth Christian men to study the Gospel," he said, "in that tongue in which they know best Christ's sentence" (H. Robinson, p. 137).

That means translation. And if translation means change, so be it. But by God's grace, may it be sanctified change—not change that destroys, but change that leads to His kingdom.

Translating the Word into the common tongue has its risks. In 1546 the dramatic power unleashed by Tyndale's and Coverdale's New Testaments in England alarmed the authorities. In July, Henry VIII issued a royal decree: "No man or woman of what estate, condition, or degree was after the last day of August to receive, have, take, or keep Tyndale's or Coverdale's New Testament." With tears in his own eyes and standing before a weeping Parliament, the king lamented that "the book was disputed, rhymed, sung and jangled in every alehouse and tavern" (H. Robinson, p. 180).

But tears stained other faces too when the Bible in the common language was snatched away. A pathetic sadness is mirrored in a handwritten note penned by a shepherd on the flyleaf of a secular book, Polydor Vergil's *History of Inventions*: "When I kepe Mr Letymers shepe I bout thys boke when the Testament was oberragated, that shepeherdys myght not rede hit. I pray God amende that blindness. Wryt by Robert Wyllyams, keppyng shepe upon Seynbury hill. 1546" (H. Robinson, p. 180).

Those who have longed to read God's Word in their own language are not afraid of losing their faith by reading a new translation. They seek faith and an end to their famine for the Word of God. For them a new translation is the source of life.

Why then should we be afraid? What is the source of that strange foreboding that a new translation could destroy faith? If we really are convinced that our spiritual life is dependent on one or more particular verses in a particular translation, we are indeed at risk.

But rather than throw away a mountain of supposedly dangerous translations, let us take a hard look at the dangerous conviction. It is a very old one and crops up repeatedly through history. And it may help us

recognize that the alarm has almost always been sounded by religious authorities and by the older saints who have enjoyed the Word of God for years, not by eager new Christians, longing to read the Word of God for the first time in their own tongue.

To be perfectly blunt, then, it appears that the problem lies in the fact that human beings simply are comfortable with what they know. When change threatens, dire warnings of disaster are called upon as a means of preserving the status quo. A touch of history can help us keep our own day and our own fears in perspective.

Translations: A History of Resistance to Change

When we resist changing God's Word, we keep good company. Moses warned Israel against adding to or taking away from the commands He had given (Deut. 4:2; 12:32). Jesus declared that not a jot or tittle would pass from the law until all was fulfilled (Matt. 5:18). And the book of Revelation condemns anyone who dares to add to or take away from the words of the book (Rev. 22:18, 19). Those are somber warnings.

But what about translations? In practice New Testament writers were very free in the way they used translations of the Old Testament. When Matthew quoted Isaiah 7:14 to prove Jesus' virgin birth, and when the author of Hebrews cited Psalm 8:5, 6 as proof of Jesus' incarnation, both preferred the Septuagint because it provided the desired wording.

But that relative freedom to adapt and translate, as seen in New Testament writers, contrasts with a certain rigidity toward translation that crops up again and again in Jewish and Christian circles. A brief historical survey reveals that the deep reverence for the King James Version and the accompanying resistance to change represent an attitude that has long been typical of human behavior. Regardless of how damaging or helpful it may be, it is still typical. Let's note some key examples.

Josephus and the Hebrew Bible—Although writing about the original text of the Hebrew Scriptures and not a translation, the Jewish historian Josephus (died ca.A.D. 100) revealed an attitude toward the text of the Hebrew Bible that would have made translation difficult. Defending the Jewish faith in response to Apion, a critic of the Jews, Josephus described the nature of Scripture: "We have given practical proof of our reverence for our own Scriptures. For, although such long ages have now passed, no one has ventured either to add, or to remove, or to alter a syllable" (*Contra Apion* 1. 42 [Loeb ed.]).

Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint—The Letter of Aristeas, dating

from about 200 B.C., described the origin of the Greek Septuagint and defended its reliability. The letter told how the Egyptian ruler Ptolemy Philadelphus requested from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures translated into Greek for the new library he wanted to build in Alexandria.

The king hosted a team of 72 scholars from Jerusalem, who proceeded to translate the Hebrew Bible. Aristeas described how they worked together, comparing results with each other until they agreed upon a common reading. Later versions of the story became increasingly flamboyant, even claiming that the scholars, working independently as teams of two in separate cubicles, produced 36 identical translations!

While the original description of the translation process in Aristeas was realistic, the stance toward the completed project was not. Note the resistance to change: "After the books had been read, the priests and elders of the translators and the Jewish community and the leaders of the people stood up and said, that since so excellent and sacred and accurate a translation had been made, it was only right that it should remain as it was and no alteration should be made in it. And when the whole company expressed their approval, they bade them pronounce *a curse in accordance with their custom upon any one who should make any alteration either by adding anything or changing in any way whatever any of the words which had been written or making any omission.* This was a very wise precaution to ensure that the book might be preserved *for all the future time unchanged"* (Lines 310, 311, in 2APOT, p. 121 [italics mine]).

That high view of the Septuagint continued in Christian circles. In the early centuries Christians generally held that the Septuagint was inspired.

Latin Vulgate: Back to the Hebrew—One of the more fascinating chapters in the history of the Bible, one that thoroughgoing Protestants may have difficulty understanding, is the production of the Latin Vulgate translation. The need arose for a "common edition" (*editio vulgata*) to replace the many "Old Latin" translations in circulation among Latin-speaking churches.

In 382 Pope Damasus asked Jerome, an accomplished scholar and linguist, to prepare a fresh revision of the Old Latin version on the basis of the Greek text. After completing the Gospels, he worked on the rest of the New Testament and began on the Old Testament as well.

The Old Latin translations were based largely on the Greek Septuagint. Jerome, however, took his task so seriously that he moved to Palestine and mastered Hebrew. Increasingly, as he joined in dialogue with Jews, Jerome

became exasperated and embarrassed. Many of his Septuagint-based arguments were rejected out of hand, because Jews did not accept the Septuagint as Scripture.

Two significant results came from Jerome's study of Hebrew and his conversations with Jews: (1) he opposed the use of the Apocrypha as Scripture and (2) he chose the Hebrew text instead of the Septuagint as the basis for his Old Testament translation.

As noted in our discussion of canon, Jerome argued against including the Apocrypha in the Old Testament. Since the Septuagint included the Apocrypha and the Hebrew Bible did not, his position amounted to an argument in favor of the Hebrew Bible as the Christian Old Testament. While Jerome's position did not carry the day in his own Catholic tradition, it eventually won out with the Reformers. Luther and his colleagues cited Jerome in their successful efforts to establish a canon of Scripture that did not contain the Apocrypha.

Jerome's increasing inclination to rely on the Hebrew text as the basis for his Old Testament translation also tended to cast him, somewhat unfairly, as an opponent of the Septuagint. His position was sound from a scholarly point of view, but gained him no friends among churchmen. The Vulgate eventually won the respect it deserved, but not during the translator's lifetime. As long as he lived, poor Jerome received more than his share of hate mail for his efforts!

He undoubtedly brought some of the rough treatment on himself, for he was neither shy nor gentle in defending his position and attacking his critics. He was prepared for the fire storm from churchmen when he decided to turn away from the Septuagint in favor of the Hebrew. "With my eyes open," he wrote in the preface to Isaiah, "I thrust my hand into the flame" (cited in Kelly, p. 159).

Jerome's critics also found unacceptable his tampering with the Old Latin versions. When his fresh translation of the Gospels was greeted with the howls of indignation he had predicted, he wrote an angry letter, calling his opponents "two-legged asses" who preferred muddy rivulets instead of the pure fountain of the original Greek. They were so stupid, he said, that they did not realize that he was correcting not the words of the Lord, but the faulty Latin manuscripts. To silence them he would blow a trumpet in their ears, since a lyre would make no impression on asses (Kelly, p. 89). In the preface to *Hebrew Questions*, a book defending his preference for the Hebrew text, he assailed his detractors as "filthy swine who grunt as they trample on pearls" (Kelly, p. 157).

Clearly, Jerome was struggling with conservative defenders of traditional texts, the Septuagint and the Old Latin. They argued for the familiar as though it were the original. And that was where they parted company with Jerome.

The Reformation: A Return to Biblical and Modern Languages—When it comes to the text of Scripture, the Reformers are noteworthy for two accomplishments: (1) a return to the original languages (Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew for the Old) instead of relying on the Latin; and (2) the translation of Scripture into the language of the common people. They came under sharp attack on both counts.

If in Jerome's day defenders of the status quo argued for the Septuagint and the Old Latin, in Luther's day they fought for the Latin Vulgate. Jerome had done his work well; the Vulgate had won its way. The Reformers found it as firmly entrenched as the Septuagint had been centuries before.

A good example of the reverence for Latin is reflected in the furor over the "Johannine comma" (1 John 5:7, 8), as noted in our discussion of manuscripts in Chapter 4. Erasmus unleashed a storm of protest by dropping the "comma" from his critical edition of the Greek New Testament. The Latin Vulgate takes precedence, he was told, regardless of what he might find in ancient Greek manuscripts.

Even when publishing texts in the original languages, editors found ways to praise the Latin. For example, the first edition of the Hebrew text to be published under Christian sponsorship appeared in the so-called Complutensian Polyglot, a monumental work printed in Spain, 1514-1517. For the Old Testament, it reproduced in parallel columns the Hebrew text, the Greek Septuagint, and the Latin Vulgate. The editor explained that the Vulgate was placed in the most important position—in the middle, between the Hebrew and the Greek—just as Jesus had been crucified between two thieves! (Price, p. 36).

Not only was Latin king at the scholarly level, but it also exerted a powerful influence against the spread of Scripture in the common languages. As the people throughout Europe clamored increasingly for the Bible in their own language, ecclesiastical authorities fought the spread of the new translations.

Tyndale, for his efforts in translating the New Testament into English (1525), was hunted down on the Continent, strangled, and burned. His last words are etched into history: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

Tragically, Tyndale's fate was all too typical for the early sixteenth-

century translators of the English Bible. As H. Wheeler Robinson poignantly notes, of all the early English translators, only Miles Coverdale died in bed (H. Robinson, p. 182).

The Reformers' desire to place God's Word in the hands of the people flew in the face of the defenders of Latin. Tyndale clearly stated the view of the Reformers: "I had perceived by experience how that it was impossible to establish the laypeople in any truth except the Scriptures were plainly laid before their eyes in their mother tongue, that they might see the process, order, and meaning of the text" (H. Robinson, p. 156).

The extent of the official support for the Latin Vulgate is reflected in the actions of the English Convocation in 1542. There the bishops decided to revise the official Great Bible "according to that Bible [the Vulgate] which is usually read in the English Church." Bishop Gardiner of Winchester actually introduced a list of 99 Latin words to be retained in their original form "for their genuine and native meaning, and for the majesty of the matter in them contained," or "be fitly Englished with the least alteration." The carefully chosen list included "Ecclesia, Poenitentia, Pontifex, Sacramentum, Mysterium Episcopus, Gratia, Charitas" among others (H. Robinson, p. 179).

The project was never implemented, however, probably because patriotic, anti-Vulgate impulses cropped up even in official circles. During the reign of Edward VI (1537-1553), for example, a fragment (first published in 1843) from the pen of Sir John Cheke, professor of Greek at Cambridge, revealed a list of Latin words to be banned in favor of genuine English: "uprising" for resurrection, "gainbirth" for regeneration, "crossed" for crucified, "mooned" for lunatic, and "hundreder" for centurion (H. Robinson, p. 181).

The authorized King James Version of 1611 attempted to steer a middle course between the two extremes, though tending slightly toward conservatism. In 1525 Tyndale had been so bold as to introduce the word "love" into 1 Corinthians 13. The King James translators preferred the Latin derivative "charity." It would be several centuries before the word "love" would find a home again in that well-known chapter.

The King James Version and the New King James Version—Advocates of the status quo in Bible versions have maintained a vigorous presence over the years. Whether defending the Septuagint in Jerome's day, the Vulgate at the time of the Reformation, or the King James Version in our own day, people of deep religious conviction have tended to prefer the familiar over either the original or the modern. These attitudes are

understandable but unfortunate and are nourished more by emotion and habit than by informed reflection.

One modern development among conservative Christians is truly remarkable, namely, the publication of the New King James Version. The key principle chosen by the translators as the basis for this version illustrates how the familiar proves more important than the original. In short, they chose to allow the 1611 text of the KJV to overrule all ancient manuscripts.

Although in some ways they took quite a sophisticated approach (as we will note below), the method followed by the publishers of the New King James Version also throws into bold relief the paradoxical tension between the original and the familiar. On the one hand, when evangelicals argue that only the original *autographs* are without error (*autograph* is the technical term for the author's "signed" original), they show a strong interest in moving back as close as possible to the original. But on the other hand, that whole concern about the "original" slips into the background when it comes to preserving the familiar KJV through the NKJV.

As far as I am aware, the New King James Version is the only major English translation that absolutely rejects the use of ancient manuscripts in the main body of the text. All manuscript variants from all ancient sources are put into the footnotes. In effect, NKJV has taken the Greek text used by the King James translators (essentially Erasmus's third edition, the so-called textus receptus, or received text) and used it *as if* it were an *original* manuscript.

In order to recognize the implications of what the translators have done, we need to understand the two clear methodological choices available to anyone who prepares a translation or a "critical" edition of a text. To use the technical jargon, a translator or editor can choose to produce either (1) *a basis text* or (2) *an eclectic text*.

Basis Text—One manuscript forms the basis of the edition. The editor makes no changes whatsoever in this basis text. It is printed as is. All variations from other manuscripts—including deletions, additions, or rearrangements of the text—are indicated in the footnotes.

This approach requires a high level of expertise on the part of readers, since they (not the editors) determine whether any of the manuscript variations printed in the footnotes are superior to the basis text.

A basis text is often selected for a critical edition when a single manuscript of high quality is available. The standard critical Hebrew text

published by the Bible Societies, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, is handled in this way. The Leningrad Manuscript B 19a, dating from A.D. 1009, is the basis manuscript. All variations from other sources are entered in a "critical apparatus" in the footnotes.

Eclectic Text—No single manuscript is printed in its entirety as the main text. Instead, editors construct a text composed of the best readings from the best manuscripts. In each instance in which variants occur, the editors evaluate all possibilities and select what they judge to be the superior reading. A single text is constructed by the editors, but it is an eclectic text that they have drawn from many manuscripts, not just one. The footnotes list the manuscript options not used by the editors so that other experts can evaluate the evidence and make their own choices. Thus a good eclectic text can be used with profit both by experts and by novices. The latter, of course, must rely totally on the judgment of the editors.

The standard "critical" editions of the Greek New Testament are eclectic texts; so are the overwhelming majority of modern Bible translations, whether produced by liberal or conservative translators. The eclectic text approach was Erasmus's choice for his third edition of the Greek New Testament, the one destined to become the textus receptus. Hence it was the choice of the King James translators.

But when we come to the New King James Version, the decision to treat the textus receptus as a basis text enabled the translators to leave all the problematic passages in place. While the language may be modern, readers of the NKJV never have to worry about a familiar line or verse falling out of their Bible. Everything in the KJV is in the NKJV. The three noted examples discussed in the chapter on manuscripts are all in place in the main body of the text: the closing doxology of the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6), the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8), and the "Johannine comma" (1 John 5).

Understandably, those who prefer the status quo and the familiar are pleased by such an approach. The end result, however, is acceptance of the *results* of the King James translators while rejecting the very *method* that achieved those results. The King James translators constructed an eclectic text, choosing the very best readings from the best manuscripts. The fact that the manuscripts available to them were relatively few and late makes it all the more remarkable that this early *eclectic text* has been elevated to a single *basis text*, said to be the Bible "as it reads" and, presumably, as it was written.

I do not doubt for a moment that the Lord can use the New King James

Version to bring souls into His kingdom. But I am uncomfortable with the principle on which the translation is based. In effect, the NKJV translators are acting as if the Bible were written in 1611 rather than over many centuries and that the familiar is more important than the original.

Living With Different Translations

Some will argue that it is not good to disturb new converts, children, or old saints with variant readings and different translations. But who will be there to help them at the moment of rude awakening? I much prefer a gentle process of education that enables us to be reassuring as well as realistic. I do not want my brothers and sisters to be caught by surprise. I do not want them to be afraid.

Many conservative Christians fear that an error, a loose end, a difference in translation, could obliterate faith. Adventists are possibly even more vulnerable since our unique doctrinal heritage was built up and supported by the King James Version. If a key Adventist verse—Daniel 8:14, perhaps—is no longer recognizable in a modern translation, will we lose our faith by using that translation?

I have heard that fear expressed more than once. At one time I sensed traces of it in myself. I have seen it in my students and perhaps most vividly among some of the "old guard," who love the familiar, "certain sound" of the trumpet.

What we need, I believe, is to have the right people at our side at the right time. At crucial points godly saints must be there to help, not to warn about the dangers of new translations, but to reassure that new translations are an aid to faith. After working with many students over the years who have been warned and thus are fearful of losing their faith, I know they need stable Christians who have worked through the "problems" themselves and still believe.

Within the Adventist tradition, Ellen White has served that function for me. Although she too often is used to enforce a narrow view of life, my own study of her writings has convinced me that she was a remarkably practical and broad-minded woman with a keen perception of the nature of Scripture. By enabling me to overcome my fear of Scripture, she made it possible for Scripture itself to take over and continue to broaden my perspective. That is a process which is still happening in my life today, and I am most grateful for it.

Summary: The Original, the Familiar, the Effective

Three concerns come to the front when we talk about translations.

First, we want to hear as clearly as possible the authentic, original words from God's messenger. That means coming as close to the original as possible through the early manuscripts. An important sliver of truth lingers in the Muslim's reverence for the original Koran in Arabic, or for the evangelical's preference for the original "inerrant" autograph.

Second, we want to preserve that which is near to our hearts and dear to our experience. The classic cadences of the King James Version—including the doxology of the Lord's Prayer—stay with us, and we are the richer for it. Our children, living in the midst of a blizzard of modern translations, will never sense the full surge of power that comes through the memorization of fixed words of Scripture.

Third, the Word of God must be effective. That is where the new translations come in. Wycliffe's words still apply today: "It helpeth Christian men to study the gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ's sentence" (Robinson, p. 137). As language changes, people need to hear the Word in a language they can understand.

Regardless of whatever translation you might have in your hand, there is truth in Ellen White's fervent statement: "Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads [KJV, NKJV, NEB, RSV, TEV, the Hebrew, the Greek, the Septuagint, the Vulgate], and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost" (1SM, p. 18).

CHAPTER
SIX

Heavenly Message, Earthen Vessel

"The only thing archaeology ever proved was all the errors in the Bible."

"If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that Book, it did not come from the God of truth."

"The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth."

Who said those things?

The first statement about "all the errors in the Bible" came from a well-known biblical scholar—best left unnamed in print—who was addressing a class of seminary students at an American university.

The second statement, arguing that one mistake is as good as a thousand, appears in the journal of John Wesley, the devout reformer and founder of Methodism (Wesley/Curnock, Vol. VI, p. 117).

The third statement, suggesting that God's Word blends the weakness of humanity with the power of divinity, is by Ellen White in the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* (p. vi-vii).

How difficult is it to avoid the extremes suggested by the first two statements and arrive at a truly "incarnational" view of inspiration, as suggested by the third quotation? Difficult. Very difficult—because the tendencies represented by the two more extreme positions work against each other. The professor, for example, who more or less spat out the first

statement grew up in a devout Christian home where the sentiments of the second statement held sway. But in classic pendulum fashion, his fuming about "all the errors" in the Bible now irritates God-fearing believers to the point where they simply tune him out and therefore discover none of the reasons that drove him to make such a statement.

This chapter has a twofold purpose: first, to explain the importance of an incarnational view of Scripture, which blends the human and divine; second, to explore some of the reasons why such a view is so difficult to develop and maintain.

Importance of an Incarnational View of Scripture

The nature of the biblical text and the needs of human experience—those are the key aspects addressed by an incarnational model of Scripture. In the words of the Ellen White quotation above, the first aspect focuses on the "earthen vessel," the second on the "treasure" that it contains, "the glory of divine power."

On the human side, any theory of Scripture must be developed on the basis of what we *actually* find in Scripture rather than on what we *want* to find. If our theory is realistic, based on the evidence in Scripture itself, then we will not be shocked when we read it.

A *realistic* theory will not only focus on the "treasure" that exudes "the glory of divine power" but also honestly describe the "earthen vessels" and the "imperfect expression of human language." For devout believers this latter element is precisely that which is easiest to overlook. One can scarcely miss, for example, Wesley's horror at the thought of discovering too much humanity in Scripture.

On the divine side, any theory of Scripture must enable the Word to satisfy the human longing to meet God. Echoes of the divine reverberate through the Bible. For believers it is the Word of *God*, not the word of man. But someone not sympathetic to the divine impulse sees only the "earthen vessels" and the "imperfect expression of human language," missing completely the "glory of divine power, full of grace and truth."

History shows how difficult it has been to maintain a view of Scripture that is equally faithful to both the human and the divine aspects. Why? That is a question we must now explore.

The Challenge of Blending the Human and the Divine

Since the late nineteenth century, so-called mainstream scholarship has been preoccupied with the wide range of human factors that have

contributed to the present form of Scripture. All too often such scholarship has been oblivious to the perspective of those who more readily see only the divine side of the Word of God.

Recently, however, mainstream scholarship is showing greater interest in what makes fundamentalists tick. While full mutual appreciation is still lacking, serious interest has been aroused in the scholarly community. And traces of genuine sympathy are beginning to crop up.

Kathleen Boone, in *The Bible Tells Them So*, a critical analysis of fundamentalist thinking, drops hints of a softening in scholarly attitudes. She first cites James Barr, a prominent Christian biblical scholar who has been a less-than-sympathetic critic of fundamentalism: "People like or want to believe that there is somewhere some one book that is absolutely true or correct, and if there is to be such a book, in our society it is likely to be the Bible" (Barr, p. 139; cited in Boone, p. 108).

As Boone points out, Barr's tone implies that "our wishing for certainties and true books is believed by some to be unsophisticated, a sign of intellectual weakness and 'credulity.' It is thus perceived as the province of the naive, the fearful, the untutored" (Boone, p. 108).

Boone herself, however, then sympathetically quotes contemporary literary critic Frank Kermode, who argues that there is "one belief" that unites us all, from the Gospel writers themselves to those who "argue away inconvenient portions of their texts and those who spin large plots to accommodate the discrepancies and dissonances into some larger scheme." In Kermode's view, the one uniting belief is the "conviction that somehow, in some occult fashion, if we could only detect it, everything will be found to hang together" (Kermode, p. 72; cited in Boone, p. 108).

The uneasiness with which we stand together on this common ground is reflected in Boone's observation that Kermode has held up a "mirror in which we see reflected our own image and that of some distant cousins we might prefer not to call kin." But Boone is willing to claim them, admitting a certain "profound sense of kinship" with fundamentalist interpreters of the Bible and ordinary readers alike (Boone, p. 108).

Such moments of candor and wistfulness, as brief and fleeting as they may be in our cocksure secular world, are nevertheless significant. And they crop up so unexpectedly—from my university friend mentioned in chapter 1, or from the modern atheistic Jew, Abraham Gordon, in Chaim Potok's *The Promise*, who says in an unguarded moment: "Sometimes I wish there *were* a personal God" (Potok, p. 298), or from my seatmate on a flight from Europe, a sophisticated Scottish lady with a Presbyterian

background but now an agnostic married to a devout French Roman Catholic lawyer. We fell into conversation about religion. "You strike me as having such a simple faith," she said at one point, adding hastily, "and I mean that as a compliment"—recognizing quite rightly that I normally would not consider such an observation complimentary. "I wish you could talk to my husband," she said. "He also believes."

But the occasional trace of wistfulness does not yet constitute a serious effort on the part of scholars to explore *sympathetically* the potential for an incarnational model of Scripture that integrates both the human and the divine. Can we see *and* believe—see the human *and* still believe in the divine? Or must we choose between one or the other?

I hold the conviction that it is possible to see the human *and* still believe in the divine. But the challenges are daunting. What follows are some observations on why it is so difficult.

The Human Response to Divine Authority

At the root of our problem, I believe, is the way fallen human beings relate to authority. In a perfect world, as I conceive it at least (and my view is shaped very much by Ellen White's mature writings on the subject), created beings are continually *persuaded* by a knowledge of divine *goodness*, not *coerced* by the threat of divine *power* and raw authority. In other words, motivation is *internal and natural* rather than *external and forced*. Such a view is suggested by a key passage from *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*: "In heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy" (MB, p. 109).

Since the invasion of sin, however, human beings are inclined to see divine authority as absolute, coercive, and arbitrary. And based on my own observations of human behavior, I believe we are inclined to view all authority from such a perspective. The everyday word we use to describe such a view of authority is simply *authoritarian*. When we describe someone as authoritarian, we generally mean that such a person does not seek input or advice, but takes action without counsel and uses authority to enforce his or her own position.

In an authoritarian structure we obey because we view the authority as powerful, not because what the authority demands is good. And in such a

structure the power of the authority can be undermined in two ways: (1) evidence of flaws or weakness in the authority; and (2) evidence that those under authority can exercise freedom to criticize, evaluate, or ignore the mandates of the authority. In a thoroughgoing authoritarian system, evidence of the second is already proof of the first. In other words, when an authority figure grants freedom instead of demanding obedience, it is a fatal weakness. For when fear disappears in a system based on power and motivated by fear, obedience cannot but disappear also.

We can test our orientation to authority by referring to such examples as speed limits and taxes. Do we obey speed laws out of concern for public safety, or because we fear fines and cancellation of insurance? Do we pay taxes because we love our country and know the services provided by government are good, or because we want to avoid fines and jail? And when was the last time you heard of people paying more taxes than they absolutely had to because they "loved" their country, state, county, or city?

Even if in our more sober moments we are able to view laws as good, we react to them as if they were arbitrary. And anything viewed as arbitrary has the potential for angering us. That is why speed limits and taxes easily irritate us. When parents and teachers arbitrarily use their authority, they can expect a similar reaction.

Addressing educators, Ellen White once observed: "Arbitrary words and actions stir up the worst passions of the human heart" (6T, p. 134). As I look at my own tendencies in relation to people and institutions, I know exactly what she means.

In the political arena arbitrary authority is the basis for blind worship—and then violent rebellion. Because of democratic influences, authority figures in North America generally appear more human and negotiable. We allow them more flaws and view them as more willing to receive counsel. At root, our view of authority is based on goodness, not power. We give our leaders power because we think they are good; they do not seize power and proceed to tell us what is good. And because we can change our minds relative to whether or not our leaders are good, we are not so inclined to worship them, nor do we have to launch into open rebellion against them. Thus we avoid the violent swings from absolute obedience to anarchic rebellion that are so prevalent in many parts of our world.

Turning to Scripture, I would suggest that the extreme views toward biblical authority offer a striking parallel to views of authority in general.

Scripture is viewed either as the absolute and perfect Word of God or as nothing but a human book with no authority whatsoever. Any concession at all to the human element risks its authority as something divine.

Given an authoritarian view of Scripture, its power can be undermined in the same two ways that any authority can be undermined: (1) evidence of flaws or errors and (2) evidence that those under its claims (that is, human beings) have the freedom to choose whether and how they will relate to its mandates. We will have several opportunities to observe how these two ways of "undermining" the authority of Scripture play into the hands of those advocating the extreme views. And we will attempt to define biblical authority in such a way that neither the flaws in the "earthen vessels" nor our freedom to respond to its claims will undermine its power in our lives.

We turn now to some examples and illustrations that can help us better understand the all-or-nothing authoritarian approach to life and how it affects our thinking.

One of my colleagues tells an experience from the classroom in another culture that nicely illustrates the all-or-nothing attitude toward authority. He was teaching a group of ministers. His students were highly motivated and doing well in the class, generally scoring close to 90 percent on the tests.

After the students had received back one particular test, however, a murmur rippled through the group in connection with one question. Half the students had missed it. Recognizing that the question could be ambiguous, my colleague, in good North American fashion, simply told the class that he would toss out that question and not count it either way. In western North America, that is simply good teaching procedure. In fact, a teacher could easily be drawn and quartered if he or she did not respond in that manner.

In that more authoritarian culture, however, the students did not appreciate the flexibility of the teacher. The next day three of the students spoke with evident concern to the translator. "Our teacher will undermine his authority," they said, "if he does that again." In their culture, teachers (and probably authority figures in general) are always right, even if they are wrong!

In a system based on goodness, in contrast to one based on power, students exercise their freedom to correct the occasional mistakes of a teacher. As long as the mistakes are only occasional, the students' view of the teacher's goodness is actually enhanced. (In a goodness-based system

too, however, too many mistakes would naturally undermine confidence.) But in an authoritarian culture, students would rather live with the quiet suspicion that the teacher had erred rather than hear him say in public that he was wrong. By admitting a weakness in his test, the teacher had undermined his own authority. How could the students trust him?

North America certainly is not free from such attitudes in the classroom, though they would be the exception rather than the rule. I remember one incident when an angry student surfaced during a test postmortem session. As we reviewed the test in class, we came to a question to which virtually the whole class of some 100 students objected. When I asked for a show of hands, it was evident that almost everyone had missed it. I capitulated almost immediately and tossed the question out. But one student on the front row continued to mutter and grumble. Finally, with some sharpness in my voice, I fear, I asked him what the trouble was, reminding him that I had already admitted that the question was bad and had thrown it out.

"That's just the trouble," he said. "You're the teacher. You're not supposed to make mistakes." For him authorities are always right, even when they are wrong.

During the year I spent as an exchange teacher at our Adventist school in (West) Germany, Marienhoehe Seminary, I was reminded again and again of the differences in cultures and personalities. In my classes in America the complaints of the students are likely to be "How is that relevant to my life?" In Germany it was "Where does that fit into my outline?" The Americans want meaning more than order. For the Germans, order is the basis of meaning.

In that same connection, I am reminded of a conversation I had with Dr. Walter Harrelson, then dean of the Divinity School at Vanderbilt University. As I explored the possibility of my enrolling at Vanderbilt for graduate study, I asked him to assess the differences in preparation and performance of European students as compared with American students.

"European students come with a phenomenal ability to master a body of material," he said. "But generally they do not have as good a feel for relevance or application. American students, by contrast, tend to be careless when it comes to mastery. But they very readily sense what is relevant and practical. So," Dr. Harrelson added with a smile, "we try to tighten up the Americans and loosen up the Europeans."

While I lived in Germany, I had many good-natured—at times almost hilarious—discussions with German friends over the differences between

Americans and Germans. Since I had also spent some three years in Scotland, I often succumbed to the temptation to make three-cornered comparisons between the British, the Germans, and the Americans. Typically, I had little difficulty coming to a consensus with my German friends relative to the common characteristics: the British are polite and cautious; the Germans thorough and vigorous; the Americans pragmatic to the point of being careless and cordial to the point of being dishonest.

When we turn specifically to attitudes toward Scripture, it is of interest to note that some of the most radical biblical criticism sprang up on German soil. Similarly, some of Scripture's staunchest defenders are of Germanic origin. Furthermore, not only the Reformation but also some of the most noted pietistic movements originated in Germany. In other words, whatever the Germans do, they do thoroughly. "*Alles oder nichts*" (all or nothing) is remarkably applicable in a number of arenas.

When it comes to theology and biblical studies, I have heard sophisticated professors from both Germany and Britain draw parallel conclusions relative to the strengths and weaknesses of the university systems in each country. In another interesting conversation during my graduate school search, I asked a leading German biblical scholar, at that time teaching at an American university, for an evaluation of the British system. I was considering the University of Edinburgh at the time.

"Ah," he exclaimed. "The British are always 60 years behind the times. The cutting edge is in Germany. But of course," he added, somewhat more cautiously, "if you are interested in that which is enduring and stands the test of time, then Britain is a good place to be. That which is current today in Germany, as exciting as it may be, will likely be out-of-date in a very short time."

I chose Edinburgh. There I was amused, but not surprised, to hear the Scottish professors quip, "Theology is born in Germany and corrected in Scotland."

Because of the many international elements at work in Adventism, all of this has a rather direct bearing on our attitudes toward Scripture. Among German Adventists, for example, I found very little enthusiasm for an incarnational model of inspiration. They were puzzled more than anything. It seemed so much tidier to develop an argument for Scripture as being either thoroughly human (as the radical critics do) or thoroughly divine (as its staunch defenders do).

In my view, Ellen White's more practical orientation is heard with difficulty in that setting. One German brother even admitted candidly that

the Lord wisely saw to it that the Adventist Church was born in America. As he saw it, Americans were simply more adaptable to the varied needs of the world field.

One of the special contributions that American Adventist scholars have to make, I believe, is in articulating a truly incarnational model of inspiration, one that avoids the two dogmatic extremes.

Curiously, however, when one is dealing with extreme positions, sometimes the only way to counter one extreme effectively is with an equally forceful statement of the opposite extreme. In a limited way this is illustrated by the two manuscripts that are brought together at the beginning of *Selected Messages*, book 1. One of my students called to my attention the difference in tone between the two pieces. I had not noticed that the first manuscript (pp. 15-18) emphasizes the divine in Scripture; the second (pp. 19-21), the human. I have since noticed that my students, depending on their temperament, background, and personality, will often prefer one piece to the other. They even sometimes profess some difficulty with the other one.

In the first section we find the following statements in defense of the divine authority of the Word.

"I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word."

"Brethren, let not a mind or hand be engaged in criticizing the Bible."

"Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticism in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost."

In the second section we find the key statements emphasizing the human element in Scripture.

"There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures."

"Everything that is human is imperfect."

"The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression."

"God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible."

"It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired."

The first manuscript clearly emphasizes that Scripture is authoritative without question. It is divine. It speaks to those who fear that their whole world will collapse because someone has "criticized" Scripture. Hence, the strong defense of biblical authority.

The second manuscript argues that despite questions pertaining to the human element, the authority of Scripture remains intact. By listing some

of the questions that arise in connection with the human element, that manuscript allows us to recognize certain human "imperfections" in Scripture. What is remarkable about that second manuscript is the subtle way in which Ellen White is both realistic and reassuring. That is why it is such a masterpiece.

If the church is spiritually healthy, it will hear advocates on both sides of the issue, those affirming the divinity and those recognizing the humanity of Scripture. Inevitably, "Yes, but . . ." conversations will continue as each of us tries to explain why our perspective is clearer and better. That is as it should be—as long as each of us recognizes that our individual view may not be adequate for the entire church.

Occasionally authorities in the church attempt to cut off discussion and eliminate the natural diversity of opinion that is entirely legitimate within a group of human beings. I suspect that those who attempt to impose their view of the Bible by authoritarian means tend to view all authority in a similarly monolithic fashion.

Within Adventism, Elder G. I. Butler offers an interesting example of this phenomenon. He was a forceful personality and made significant contributions during the many years he served the church. But his view of authority repeatedly got him into difficulty. Three examples will suffice: (1) his view of James and Ellen White, (2) his attitude toward his own authority when in position of leadership, and (3) his view of Scripture. A common view of authority runs through all three examples.

In 1873 Butler, then president of the General Conference, published a tract on leadership in which he praised James and Ellen White as leaders among Adventists. Their leadership was incontestable, he argued. In matters of church policy, Elder White's judgment was to receive "preference" and should be carried out as fully as if it were our own (Schwarz, pp. 267, 268).

Although the General Conference officially endorsed Elder Butler's position, the Whites were not pleased. In response to Ellen White's rebuke, Butler published a remarkable confession in the *Review*, admitting that he was wrong. He also proposed a resolution at the General Conference session in which he asked that the previous endorsement of his tract be rescinded. In effect, when an "authority" told Elder Butler to be less "authoritarian," he quite naturally obeyed the authority!

When Elder Butler himself held a position of leadership, however, he continued to reflect authoritarian tendencies, his "confession" notwithstanding. In 1885 Ellen White sent a remarkably candid letter to Elder

Butler and Elder S. N. Haskell, imploring them to allow freedom to those under their supervision. "I think I have laid out this matter many times before you," she wrote, "but I see no change in your actions. . . . Set others at work that will require them to plan, and to use judgment. Do not educate them to rely upon your judgment. Young men must be trained up to be thinkers" (TM, pp. 302, 303).

In Ellen White's view, Butler's authoritarian approach robbed the church of needed talent. "There are men who today might be men of breadth of thought, might be wise men, men to be depended upon, who are not such, because they have been educated to follow another man's plan" (TM, p. 303).

With reference to the use of Scripture, Butler showed the same unbending attitude. Just prior to the 1888 General Conference he sent a circular letter to church workers in which he argued that Adventists had "never taken a stand upon Bible exegesis which they have been compelled to surrender" (cited in Knight, p. 15). Understandably, Butler was shaken when A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner suggested a fresh direction in the interpretation of Galatians 3.

In short, for Butler any properly constituted authority was virtually an absolute authority. In all three settings cited above, a common thread is evident: unthinking acceptance of authority. That was his view of the Whites' authority originally; similarly, when he himself was in authority, he expected unthinking obedience from church workers; and finally, when he looked at Scripture, he apparently assumed not only that Scripture itself was infallible but also the traditional Adventist interpretation. He had reason to be perplexed when Ellen White exclaimed: "God and heaven alone are infallible" (CWE, p. 37).

This authoritarian tendency works against an incarnational view of Scripture. If the human side of Scripture becomes too obvious, or if the diversity in Scripture makes it appear that its mandates are not clear and that human beings have the freedom to choose whether or not they should obey, the authority of Scripture is at risk. The prospect is a sobering one.

Our next chapter is crucial. It proposes an integration of human reason with divine revelation in a way that makes both factors important in Scripture. As difficult as it may be, we must recognize that the heavenly treasure comes to us in earthen vessels. God's Word mysteriously blends the human and the divine. We dare not allow our natural inclination to one extreme or the other obscure the vital significance of both.

CHAPTER
SEVEN

God's Word: Casebook or Codebook?

A casual conversation after church several years ago provides a good introduction to the casebook/codebook question posed by this chapter.

A man stepped up to me and volunteered the following comment: "I see that the School of Theology is going to begin ordaining women." He had taken his cue from an article on the topic of women's ordination that had appeared in *Westwind*, the Walla Walla College alumni journal. Based on interviews with the School of Theology faculty, the article reflected the consensus of the theology faculty that women should be ordained. Each interview, however, had included the important qualifier "when the church is ready."

"Ordination is not the responsibility of the School of Theology," I reminded him. "But we do believe the church should move in that direction, at least here in North America."

"But what do you do with Paul's counsel," he returned, "that women are to keep quiet and not have authority over men?" (see 1 Timothy 2:11-15).

"Paul's counsel reflected the culture of his day, not an enduring principle."

"But Paul based his statement on the fact that Adam was created before Eve."

"That was Paul's logic, not necessarily God's," I said, adding then an echo from *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 21, "God has not placed Himself on trial in the Bible in words, logic, or rhetoric."

"Wasn't Paul inspired?"

"Of course. But inspired writers always address their own culture—and culture changes."

"But God does not change."

Sensing that it was time to tap into some Old Testament illustrations, I asked about the laws dealing with slavery, citing those in Exodus 21:1-6.

"I see nothing wrong with slavery."

"And polygamy?" I responded. "What about the law in Exodus 21:7-11 that commands a man to grant full marital rights to his first wife if he takes the second one? Does that still apply?"

"Except for elders and deacons, I find nothing in the Bible that would forbid a man from having more than one wife."

Somewhat unnerved by his self-confident answers, I decided to try once more. "What about blood vengeance?" I asked. "Do you think a man should even the score when a near relative is killed?" (see Numbers 35:9-28).

"If we practiced blood vengeance today," was the ready response, "we would have a lot less trouble with law and order."

To my knowledge, this brother did not own slaves, have more than one wife, or practice blood vengeance. But he still felt compelled to argue that a law once given by God should live forever. For him Scripture clearly was a *codebook*.

In our culture today, a codebook is an instrument of precision. When a contractor builds to code, he goes by the book. The minimums are clear; the specifications exact. If he wishes he may install more insulation or provide more access than the code prescribes, but not less.

Typically a codebook demands *application* more than *interpretation*, obedient *compliance* more than thoughtful *reflection*. It anticipates a straightforward query from the inspector: "Did you follow code?" The answer is a simple yes or no. Proof of compliance is at hand and easily measurable.

Is Scripture like that? In some respects, yes. But I believe there is a better approach for Scripture as a whole. Let me suggest two propositions as a springboard for discussion:

1. While Scripture clearly contains some codebook elements, on balance, it is more like a casebook than a codebook.

2. Believers are reluctant to admit the casebook model for fear of undermining the authority of Scripture.

We will take up each proposition in turn and explore what it means for the church today.

Scripture: Casebook More Than Codebook

I am indebted to one of my students for the suggestion that Scripture is like a *casebook*. The suggestion grew out of class discussions on biblical law. Increasingly I am convinced that the casebook/codebook comparison is fruitful for helping us understand the nature of Scripture.

Whereas a codebook is at home in legal circles and in the realm of the trades and technology, a casebook is often a more useful tool in the behavioral and social sciences. It can also provide the raw data on which certain legal judgments are based. But instead of *mandating* a single, clearly defined response as a codebook would do, a casebook *describes* a series of examples that reflect a variety of responses under varied circumstances. None of the cases may be fully definitive or prescriptive in other settings, but each is described in a manner that could be helpful to someone facing similar circumstances.

In this chapter I will attempt to show, by way of pertinent examples, why a casebook model is preferable to a codebook for explaining much of what we find in Scripture. The following two chapters continue the discussion. Chapter 8 develops a more thorough and systematic argument for the casebook approach, especially in the realm of law. Chapter 9 explores a specific New Testament passage, Acts 15, in which the casebook approach provides a helpful framework within which to interpret events bridging the Old and New Testaments.

In the examples that follow, we will note instances in which the complexities of changing times and circumstances suggest that a casebook approach can provide the right kind of framework for understanding the breadth of biblical material.

Law Codes—The examples cited above in my after-church conversation—slavery, polygamy, and blood vengeance—are all customs supported by Old Testament law codes but which most Christians would consider inappropriate for Westerners of the twentieth century.

If, however, we look for a specific biblical command indicating that these customs are no longer valid, we will be disappointed. In a technical sense, the brother who accosted me after church was right. Nowhere does Scripture directly condemn slavery, polygamy, or blood vengeance.

Since the next chapter discusses biblical law in greater detail, one additional example can suffice here to illustrate how the Bible itself adopts something like a casebook, approach in this instance, actually reversing the application of a biblical law in the light of different circumstances.

The example involves the relationship between a man and his brother's

wife. As part of a list of forbidden incestuous relationships, Leviticus 18:16 specifically commanded a man not to "uncover the nakedness" of his brother's wife. This law formed the basis for John the Baptist's condemnation of Herod Antipas (Matt. 14:3, 4).

However, if a man died without male offspring, Deuteronomy 25:5-10 describes how a brother actually was *commanded* to take his brother's wife and carry on the brother's name. This law, known as the levirate marriage law (law of the husband's brother), was the basis for the Sadducees' trick question to Jesus: "In the resurrection, to whom does a woman belong who has married seven brothers in turn?" (see Matt. 22:23-33).

While the circumstances mandating the exception for levirate marriage were clearly spelled out, a legitimate question would be: Do either one or both of these laws still apply in our day? Regardless of the answer, a casebook approach would seem preferable to a codebook model for accommodating the differences between them.

Proverbs—A rather striking instance of apparently contradictory proverbs occurs in Proverbs 26:4, 5. The first proverb recommends one line of action; the second, precisely the opposite.

"Answer *not* a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself" (verse 4).	"Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes" (verse 5).

Some first-century rabbis found such seeming contradictions troubling, even suggesting that Proverbs did not belong in the canon. A few moments of reflection, however, will suggest that individual proverbs, by their very nature, are likely to be *generally* true rather than *universally* true. In the world of noninspired proverbs, for example, we may set two perfectly good proverbs against each other as apparently contradictory: "Too many cooks spoil the broth" versus "Many hands make light work."

What determines which proverb applies? The circumstances in the kitchen, of course. Any cook can think of times when one proverb would apply more appropriately than the other.

As for the biblical proverbs cited, one could conceive of circumstances when a fool should be confronted but other circumstances when silence would be preferable. All that assumes, of course, that we are perfectly clear that we are dealing with a fool.

How could a codebook deal with all of that? It cannot. When more than one application is possible, a casebook offers more help.

Prophetic Counsel—What would a prophet say to the following

question: "Should God's people resist a pagan invader or surrender?"

In the days of King Hezekiah, when the Assyrians threatened Jerusalem, Isaiah the prophet counseled resistance and promised victory for the kingdom of Judah (Isa. 37:5-7).

Some 100 years later, in the days of King Zedekiah, Jeremiah the prophet gave just the opposite advice when Babylon threatened Jerusalem: "He who goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you shall live and shall have his life as a prize of war" (Jer. 21:9). Understandably, Jeremiah was accused of treason.

We may not understand all the varied circumstances that led God to extend mercy to His people under Hezekiah and withdraw it from them under Zedekiah, though Hezekiah's reputation was certainly superior to Zedekiah's. But we certainly would expect God to adapt His approach to circumstances. And since a variety of factors determines the prophet's response, a casebook approach seems more adequate than a codebook.

The Words of Jesus—A question for Jesus: "What kind of physical preparations and equipment do we need when we are serving in Your name?"

Jesus answers in Luke 22:35-38: " 'When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything?' They said, 'Nothing.' He said to them, 'But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.' "

How could a codebook clearly prescribe what we are to take and when? Jesus' answer requires a casebook approach.

Bible Biographies: Public Witnessing—A question for both Daniel and Esther: "How important is it to state one's convictions clearly when under threat?"

Daniel would say: "In one instance, I told the king's servant that we could not eat the king's food. Another situation involved my friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they refused to bow the knee on the plain of Dura, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But they stood firm. Finally, when King Darius forbade his subjects the right to pray to anyone other than himself, I kept on praying three times a day from my open window. For my convictions, I was thrown in the lions' den. But the Lord protected me."

By contrast, Esther would respond: "When King Ahasuerus sought a new queen, I obeyed Uncle Mordecai and did not identify myself as a Jew. I was treated as all the other maidens until the king selected me as queen. Even then I did not reveal my identity. Not until the very existence of my

people was at stake did I take my life in my hands and admit that I was a Jew."

When Daniel advocates speaking up and Esther espouses keeping quiet, we know we need a casebook more than a codebook.

Bible Biographies: Soliciting Support From Pagans—A question for Ezra and Nehemiah: "Is it appropriate to ask pagan neighbors for protection and financial support for a trip back to Jerusalem?"

Ezra, in 457 B.C., answered no (Ezra 8:21-23).

Ellen White comments: "In this matter, Ezra and his companions saw an opportunity to magnify the name of God before the heathen. Faith in the power of the living God would be strengthened if the Israelites themselves should now reveal implicit faith in their divine Leader. They therefore determined to put their trust wholly in Him. *They would ask for no guard of soldiers.* They would give the heathen no occasion to ascribe to the strength of man the glory that belongs to God alone. They could not afford to arouse in the minds of their heathen friends one doubt as to the sincerity of their dependence on God as His people. *Strength would be gained, not through wealth, not through the power and influence of idolatrous men, but through the favor of God"* (PK, pp. 615, 616, italics mine).

Nehemiah, in 444 B.C., answered yes (Neh. 2:7-9).

Ellen White comments: "His request to the king had been so favorably received that Nehemiah was encouraged to ask for still further assistance. *To give dignity and authority to his mission, as well as to provide protection on the journey, he asked for and secured a military escort.* He obtained royal letters to the governors of the provinces beyond the Euphrates, the territory through which he must pass on his way to Judea; and he obtained, also, a letter to the keeper of the king's forest in the mountains of Lebanon, directing him to furnish such timber as would be needed. . . .

"Nehemiah did not depend upon uncertainty. The means that he lacked he solicited from those who were able to bestow. And the Lord is still willing to move upon the hearts of those in possession of His goods, in behalf of the cause of truth. *Those who labor for Him are to avail themselves of the help that He prompts men to give.* These gifts may open ways by which the light of truth shall go to many benighted lands. The donors may have no faith in Christ, no acquaintance with His word; but their gifts are not on this account to be refused" (PK, pp. 633, 634, italics mine).

Christians who are sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of the world around them can easily conceive of circumstances when it would be wise to follow Ezra's example. Other occasions may call for Nehemiah's response. The casebook of Scripture includes both Ezra and Nehemiah, and we can learn from both.

Apostolic Counsel—A question for the apostle Paul: "What about marriage in these last days?"

"That depends," he says in 1 Corinthians 7. "It is better to be single. But if you are already married, partners have a mutual obligation to grant each other conjugal rights" (verses 1-7).

"If you are now single, even though I would prefer that you remain that way, it is still better to marry than to burn with passion" (verses 8, 9).

"If you are married to a nonbeliever, stay with your partner unless he or she wishes to separate. If the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so. In such a case the believer is not bound" (verses 12-16).

The many variables Paul suggests would seem to fit more comfortably in a casebook than in a codebook.

Summary—In some of the examples just noted, the circumstances relating to apparently contradictory applications are spelled out. This is particularly true of the ancient law codes. Paul's various concessions relating to marriage are also rather well defined, though they do not eliminate the need for significant personal decisions.

In most of the other instances, however, Scripture remains largely silent about the reasons and circumstances that resulted in seemingly opposite actions or reactions. Since inspiration opened more than one legitimate alternative to the believers, they were required to choose a course of action without a clear-cut command or a specific revelation from the Lord.

That places a high level of responsibility on the individual human being. It raises the fearful possibility of choosing wrongly and rationalizing away our duty to our own detriment and to the dishonor of God. All that is rather sobering.

Let us remind ourselves, however, that in each of the above instances, believers have capably integrated both sides of a seeming "contradiction" into a meaningful pattern of obedience toward God. To answer a fool or not, to solicit support from nonbelievers or not, to witness publicly or silently—all these are serious matters of obedience toward God. But each alternative can be seen as an obedient response in the right circumstances. The difficulty is that no codebook can provide us with the right answer in

advance. Instead, we have a casebook with the various possibilities laid out before us. But ultimately, we have to choose our response. God will not do it for us.

And that last point is where the rub comes with many devout believers. Admitting that Scripture is a casebook seems entirely too open-ended. It could be seen as a dangerous invitation to take too much responsibility upon ourselves, which could then lead to wrong decisions that would dishonor God and His Word.

This reluctance to be straightforward with Scripture as a casebook is a matter we must probe more carefully in connection with our second proposition.

The Reluctance to Accept a Casebook Approach

Devout believers respect God's authority and the authority of His Word. It is understandable, perhaps, that believers in general are reluctant to say privately or publicly that a particular command or example in Scripture does not apply to them. To risk the possibility of the human will overruling the divine will is not an attractive prospect for someone really serious about obedience. Furthermore, examples can be multiplied of careless Christians who dismiss their responsibilities all too easily with a times-have-changed argument.

But even if we admit the cogency of the previously mentioned examples, the rhetoric from devout believers tends to portray God's Word as providing much clearer guidance than is actually the case when we come down to specific circumstances in our lives. Several quotations, gleaned at random from both official and unofficial Adventist sources, can serve to illustrate the fears, longings, and expectations that we bring to Scripture—all of which can cloud our own responsibilities before God and obscure the nature of the decisions we are making.

The fear of relying on humanity is reflected in the following: "We cannot measure right and wrong by our feelings or by what the majority are doing! We need something from outside ourselves to tell us where the truth lies" (Joe Crews, *Inside Report*, vol. 4, no. 5 [n.d.]).

An advertisement for some booklets by Ellen White suggests the deep reverence for inspired writings that so many of us hold. The ad describes them as being "inspired by the Holy Spirit, and therefore faultless in the messages they contain" (*Our Firm Foundation*, July 1989, p. 10). The term *faultless* implies a certain transcendent quality overshadowing any need for human beings to interpret and apply.

A longing for consistency can lead us to overlook the fact that some divine commands were temporary and that God has introduced some dramatic changes in the way He has dealt with humanity. Note how the following statement reflects the desire for consistency: "But the Bible itself offers abundant evidence that advancing light does not contradict past light. What was truth in Abraham's day did not become error in Christ's day" (Robertson, p. 66).

There is a larger consistency in Scripture, to be sure—Ellen White's phrase is "underlying harmony." But a desire for consistency should not lead us to oversimplify the evidence from Scripture. Unless we can tuck the "apparent contradictions" into a casebook, how can we explain such a startling event as God's command that Abraham sacrifice Isaac, to mention just one vivid example?

In connection with the use of Ellen White's writings as a commentary on Scripture, the same source drops a revealing hint of our deep-seated reluctance to admit that human beings must and do interpret inspired writings. A question mark is raised over the person who considers himself "free to determine his own interpretation of Scripture." Why is that dangerous? Because "one's own authority may compete with the gift of prophecy" (Robertson, p. 64).

But let us be candid about the twin dangers facing the church. Some people, indeed, have a tendency to disregard divine authority. They take the reins into their own hands and do not listen to God's Word. But a much larger number in the church are all too willing to let some authority do their thinking for them—a parent, a pastor, the church, a commentary, Ellen White, even the Bible.

An authoritarian approach to Scripture, one that assumes that all our thinking has been done for us, results in perhaps the greatest irony of all—*in the name of God, we end up relying on an arm of flesh.*

In the aftermath of the 1888 Minneapolis General Conference session, Ellen White spoke again and again on the need for believers to study and think for themselves. The following quotation is particularly appropriate when it comes to the topic of Bible study: "Beware of rejecting that which is truth. The great danger with our people has been that of *depending upon men, and making flesh their arm.* Those who have not been in the *habit of searching the Bible for themselves, or weighing evidence,* have confidence in the leading men and accept the decisions they make; and thus many will reject the very messages God sends to His people, if these leading brethren do not accept them (TM, pp. 106, 107, italics mine).

But now let us work toward a concrete solution. If we clearly define Scripture as a *casebook*, then we are admitting that the Bible lays before us the many differing ways that God has guided His people in the past, but *without making our specific decisions for us*.

How then can we know whether to answer a fool or not (Proverbs)? To witness publicly (Daniel), or to keep quiet (Esther)? To make preparations and solicit help (Nehemiah), or simply to trust that God will provide (Ezra)? To take a sword or not (Jesus)? To marry or to stay single (Paul)?

The answer is brief, beautiful, painful: *We cannot just know Scripture; we have to know God.* And in that very connection I would like to share briefly and in a rather personal way how the casebook approach to Scripture has revitalized my devotional experience. Depending on how you look at it, that three-cornered relationship involving God, His Word, and me has become more simple and more complex, easier and more difficult. The whole process has become more intense and more challenging, and boredom is never a problem anymore.

The Casebook of Scripture and the Devotional Life

I cannot remember when I made the startling discovery that my religious experience was based on a codebook or checklist perspective. Adventists steeped in the writings of Ellen White know all about the big three Christian responsibilities: prayer, Bible study, and sharing. What I discovered in my life, however, was that I was doing these three, not so much for their intrinsic value, but, quite frankly, to keep God happy.

In my mind's eye I pictured Him as a kind of giant scoutmaster with chart in hand. Each day He would mark off whether I prayed, studied my Bible, and shared. Thus in my devotional life, duty led the way and true meaning trailed along behind somewhere. I always had one eye on the clock and felt guilty when I fell short.

As I studied Scripture, however, it became clearer to me that I could not approach people—or God, for that matter—on the basis of a checklist. People and their needs differed greatly. How could I effectively point them to God? Without realizing it, I began matching people and circumstances from my modern world with the world of Scripture. As I brought the various "cases" in my life into connection with the "cases" in Scripture, a serious dialogue with God became part of the process.

As I see it now, those conversations with Him remind me that my decisions are not mine alone, but His decisions, too. Not that He does my thinking for me or that He makes the final choice, but those conversations

do keep Him and His kingdom foremost in my thinking and make it more likely that my decisions will be motivated by the principle of love rather than by the principle of selfishness.

When viewed in this way, prayer is not a substitute for thinking, but an enhancement of the thought processes. A true Christian will use his mind more, not less.

Attempting to visualize what takes place when we pray might help us understand the process better. When I raise this question with friends, the range of suggestions is intriguing. Here are some samples:

a. The radio. We are a receiver playing God's signal. In this model we are passive, God is active.

b. The pilot. God is in the control tower. We must be in touch with Him if we want to land safely, but He does not force us. We choose whether or not to listen and respond. This is a more interactive model and requires greater human responsibility.

c. The filter. Conversation with God acts like a filter on a moving stream. If our prayer life is healthy, the water is pure on the other side of the filter. When our prayer life falters, the stream keeps flowing, but the water coming through the clogged filter is impure.

The last two examples I have found particularly helpful. The pilot metaphor tells me that I must choose to listen and obey. The filter analogy reminds me that life goes on if I do not pray—but the result is impure.

In contrast with my earlier codebook or checklist approach, I no longer see Bible study and prayer simply as a means of keeping God happy. Reading His Word in dialogue with Him lies at the very heart of my relationship to the world around me. And the sharing process has also become natural, for having discovered the joy of communion with Him through His Word, I find it impossible *not* to share.

This approach to Scripture has significant implications. For example, I can no longer define sin (singular) simply in terms of sins (plural), a list of acts committed or omitted. Sin is also a way of life lived apart from God.

Defining sin in this way means that the question of "sinlessness" or "sinless perfection" no longer commands the same interest as it did before, because we now define our relationship to God in terms of "dependence" on Him. In this respect, Jesus now becomes our perfect example because we learn from Him how to relate to our heavenly Father. His life was one of constant conversation with God about the affairs of life. That can be our life too.

To summarize, I would like to emphasize that it is perfectly acceptable

for us as Christians to make human decisions on how we are to live. Scripture will not do our thinking for us. Nor will God. The tendency among devout, conservative Christians is to let revelation speak for itself. We fear that reason can destroy the authority of revelation. *The casebook approach allows us—indeed, forces us—to recognize that revelation and reason must work together. Revelation always deals with specific cases. Reason, in dialogue with the Spirit, determines which of those cases are most helpful in informing the decisions we make day by day.*

A crucial question remains, however, which we must address in our next chapter: If Scripture as a whole is a *casebook*, which parts of Scripture still have value as a permanent *codebook*?

Yes, there are absolutes in Scripture. And these we must clearly define if we are to know how to interpret the various cases in our casebook.

CHAPTER
EIGHT

God's Law: The One, the Two, the Ten, the Many

Is it for religious reasons that you don't drink coffee?"

"What does vegetarianism have to do with religion?"

Good questions from educated Britishers to a Seventh-day Adventist. How should I respond?

Just to make the picture more interesting, let's add a couple more questions (my own this time).

"Do you keep the seventh-day Sabbath for religious reasons?"

"Is it for religious reasons that you refuse to kill?"

The last question is particularly interesting since all Western cultures condemn killing on the one hand (murder) and require it on the other (armed forces). Theoretically, where capital punishment is still in vogue, one could be condemned to die either for killing or for refusing to kill, depending on the circumstances.

What does it mean to choose a course of action for "religious reasons"? Let's consider several possibilities.

A Religious Response to Divine Law: Some Options

The term *religion* assumes commitment to some ultimate reality or deity. When we cite "religious reasons" for a course of action, we are appealing to something more binding than merely rational or simply human concerns. An atheist could avoid caffeine for health reasons (doctor's orders), advocate vegetarianism for humanitarian reasons (love of animals), refuse to kill or agree to kill for civil reasons (it's the law). And in Israel, because of "Sabbath laws," an atheist would refuse to work on

Saturday for civil reasons, even though the laws themselves originally were religiously motivated.

All those reasons may be powerful and cogent, but not nearly so powerful as the appeal to "religious reasons." Religion moves into quite another realm, striking a responsive chord at a much deeper level in the human experience.

But when someone asks me if I am doing something for "religious reasons," I almost always hesitate, then give a yes/no answer, because even the question assumes a different understanding of religion than that which rules my life.

The assumption hidden in the question seems to be that certain specific acts may be directly tied to religion, while the rest of one's life functions at a strictly mundane level. In short, "religious reasons" generally assume a codebook approach, at least in popular thinking.

In a casebook approach based on eternal principles, however, *every* act is done for "religious reasons." A commitment to the one great law of love brings a wholistic perspective to life that makes religion all-encompassing.

Introducing a recent collection of scholarly essays on biblical law (*Semeia* 45), Dale Patrick notes that the topic is hardly a burning issue these days, not even for college or seminary students. The traditional Jew and the conservative Protestant Christian are exceptions, in Patrick's view, maintaining an active interest in biblical law because they see it as divine revelation. And for the latter, divine law yields "both saving doctrine and instruction in obedience."

If the desire to study law has diminished, Patrick admits that modern "critical scholars" are partially to blame, for they "actively discourage the doctrinal approach to the text of Scripture" which might arouse such a desire. "Critical reflection seeks to historicize and humanize what is written, and when the origin of the law in divine revelation to Moses is disputed, the law's claim upon the reader's attention weakens substantially. It is difficult to sustain the will to immerse oneself in the laborious, painstaking study of a congeries of law which may be merely quaint and outdated mores and taboos" (Patrick, p. 1).

Those who see the Bible simply as a human book easily dismiss biblical laws that may seem "quaint and outdated." But those of us who revere Scripture as God's Word are bound to view the matter quite differently. If we judge a law as no longer applicable for us, we must carefully weigh our arguments lest we undermine the authority of Scripture as God's Word. In other words, we must develop a consistent approach to Scripture that does

justice to *all* the laws it contains. Even if we decide that a particular law no longer applies in our day, a study of the law in its original context can broaden our understanding of God's way of dealing with human beings.

Adventists are in an excellent position to articulate a logical and consistent approach to law. And while our practice often falls short of the potential of our theory, I am tempted to argue that one of the unique Adventist contributions to the Christian world may be our understanding of law. In short, this chapter could be the most important one in the book.

But now, in summary fashion, let us compare the various ways that believers might respond to biblical law—for "religious reasons."

1. Biblical Law as Enduring Codebook—The practice of Orthodox Jews represents the purest example of this approach. Building on the Mosaic legislation in the Pentateuch, Orthodox Jews have developed a code of laws that they obey for "religious reasons." Because of the consistency of the Orthodox approach, it is valuable for illustrative purposes. We will discuss it further below.

2. Biblical Law as Enduring Codebook With New Testament Modifications Made by Jesus and the Apostles—Conservative Protestants, many Adventists included, are the primary advocates of this approach. Superficially, at least, it appears more flexible than the Orthodox view, for it admits that some of God's laws have a temporary application. The flexibility is short-lived, however, because after the deletion of some Old Testament laws ("nailed to the cross"?) and the addition of new ones (from the Sermon on the Mount, for example), a new codebook emerges that acts very much like the Orthodox one, just with different laws. Furthermore, the initial gains in flexibility may be offset by losses in consistency: How does one know if a law is permanent or temporary?

Many conservative Christians, Adventists included, tacitly adopt a codebook approach to biblical law. They adhere to a specific list of do's and don'ts for "religious reasons." Among Adventists, when the careful avoidance of meat from unclean animals juts out as a lonely island in a sea of otherwise reckless dietary habits, we can recognize a good example of codebook thinking. Later we will explore that example further in conjunction with the Orthodox approach.

Protestants of our modern era have generally limited the application of the codebook to personal and church matters. But recent years have witnessed a resurgence of interest in applying biblical law to civil matters. This "theonomic urge," as *Christianity Today* calls it, seeks to "turn the

Bible into a codebook or a blueprint for societal reordering" (Apr. 21, 1989, p. 40).

For those who cherish freedom of religion, the extension of biblical law to civil matters harks back ominously to early Puritan America, raising the specter of religious persecution. But the idea of applying biblical laws to contemporary civil culture did not die with the Puritans. The dust jacket of a 1943 book, for example, *Digest of the Divine Law*, argues as follows: "While the Ten Commandments are universally accepted as the highest moral code, there are other God-given laws which define true standards of wealth, monetary regulations, taxation, interest, debt, and all other aspects of the moral, social, and economic life of the individual, family, and nation. *We are bound by these laws just as surely as we are bound by the Ten Commandments.*"

Grouping all biblical laws into four categories (commandments, statutes, judgments, ordinances), the author identifies one group (ordinances) that is no longer in effect because "Jesus Christ fulfilled the requirements" (Rand, p. x).

Although Adventist eschatology effectively prevents us from applying biblical law to civil matters, in practice we still tend to treat biblical law simply as a codebook modified by the New Testament experience. Our heritage, however, has bequeathed us a more consistent alternative: a casebook approach based on eternal principles (No. 4 below). We will explore that option more carefully after looking at another popular approach in today's Protestant world, that of dispensationalism.

3. Biblical Law as a Series of Codebooks—While theonomists may argue that much of the Old Testament law is still binding on the Christian, dispensationalists take the opposite position. None of it is. Codebook thinking is still central to their approach, however, perhaps even paramount. They simply adopt multiple codebooks instead of just one.

Dividing world history into seven eras or dispensations, each with a self-contained set of divine laws applicable to that era, dispensationalists argue that the laws from Sinai are not applicable to Christians living in the (parenthetical) dispensation of grace. Those laws do become valid again, however, during an earthly millennium at the end of time. And in the interest of consistency, some dispensationalists even argue that animal sacrifices will be reinstated during that period.

From its nineteenth-century origins, dispensationalism has developed into a significant challenge to the traditional Christian interpretation of Scripture. It has been popularized and systematized by the notes and

commentary in the Scofield Bible and broadcast throughout the world by the vivid apocalyptic works of Hal Lindsey (such as *The Late, Great Planet Earth*; *The Liberation of Planet Earth*; *The Rapture: Truth or Consequences*; *There's a New World Coming*; and *Satan Is Alive and Well on Planet Earth*).

Dispensationalists must be given credit for recognizing the diversity of the laws in Scripture. While their seven-era system is certainly problematic, they have at least recognized the difficulty in constructing a single codebook by which Christians may order their lives.

Rather than postulating several distinct codebooks, however, Adventists have the opportunity to account for the diversity in Scripture by articulating a unified system. We will briefly sketch the essentials and then develop the case in the remainder of the chapter.

4. Biblical Law as a Casebook Based on Eternal Principles—Most Adventists familiar with Ellen White's Conflict of the Ages Series will recognize this approach, at least in fragmentary form. In the five-part *Adventist Review* series "From Sinai to Golgotha" (Dec. 1981), I argued that Ellen White's own theological development is characterized by a movement from a simple codebook approach to a casebook based on eternal principles. The essential elements are all present in Scripture; it simply remains for us to synthesize them into a coherent system.

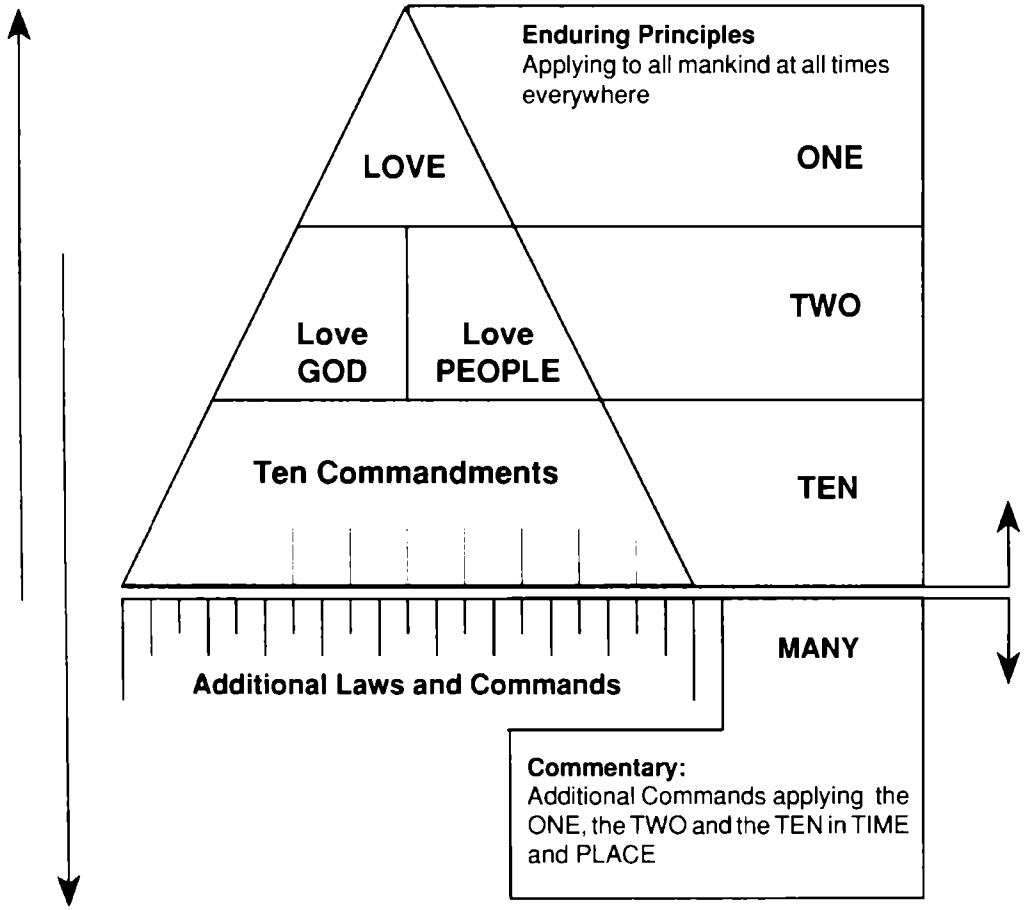
In brief, this approach sees all biblical law as commentary on and application of the *one* great law of love, which is the absolute foundation of God's being and government. The one command may be further defined as two: (1) love to God and (2) love to man. The two may be further defined as ten. The one, the two, and the ten form a pyramid of law that embodies the eternal principles of God's kingdom. All other biblical laws are applications of those principles in time and place.

The great advantage of the law pyramid is that it lays out a framework which provides simplicity and stability on the one hand, but allows for flexibility and complexity on the other. While the one, the two, and the ten may be nuanced in a very sophisticated manner, they are also very simple and straightforward. As a result, the basic needs of the illiterate are met as well as those of the most sophisticated intellectual, precisely what is required by a community with a world-wide mission.

The law pyramid is laid out graphically in the diagram on page 115. At the end of the chapter, the supporting biblical passages are brought together in Excursus A and the relevant Ellen White comments in Excursus B.

The Law Pyramid
The Restoration and Application of Love

GROWING TOWARD GOD: RESTORING THE IDEAL
External commands become internalized and therefore LESS AND LESS necessary as the law is written on the heart: "No longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me" (Jer. 31: 34).



FALLING AWAY FROM GOD: APPLYING THE IDEAL
External commands become necessary and MORE AND MORE specific as the internal law disappears from the hardened human heart: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8).

Biblical Basis: Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:4-5; Matt. 7:12; 19:16-21; 22:35-40; Mark 10:17-21; 12:28-31; Luke 10:25-28; 18:18-22; John 13:34-35; 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12, 17; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:13-14; James 2:8-12; 1 John 2:3-11; 3:10-18, 23; 4:7-12, 16-21; 5:1-3; 2 John 5-6.

Ellen White Commentary: MB 109; PP 305, 310, 311, 363, 364, 372.

The Argument in Favor of the Law Pyramid

Even though the key elements are present in the Old Testament (Deut. 6:4, 5; Lev. 19:18), the New Testament brings the pyramid into focus. We start with Jesus' pithy and succinct summary of the Old Testament: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12). Paul echoes this basic principle in Romans 13:8-10: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore *love is the fulfilling of the law.*"

Paul obviously relates the ten commands to the one. Jesus gives us the middle, two-command link in His answer to the Pharisee's question about the "great command": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. *On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets*" (Matt. 22:37-40).

A key principle undergirds the concept of the law pyramid: *some of God's laws are more important than others.* Deeply religious people often find that principle difficult to accept, for it seems to exalt human reason above the commands God has asked us to obey for "religious reasons."

But the principle that some laws are more important than others finds support in Scripture. Indeed, Jesus made that point when He declared "justice and mercy and faith" to be "weightier matters of the law," weightier than tithing "mint and dill and cummin" (Matt. 23:23). He still gives us no license, however, to reject the lesser: "These you ought to have done, *without neglecting the others.*" Whether major or minor, duties are still duties.

Now, we might all be able to think of rare instances and emergencies when minor duties give way to major ones, at least temporarily. But that is a lesser issue that may take care of itself if we address two weightier ones first: (1) resolving the tension when two duties or laws seemingly conflict with each other and (2) knowing when "times have changed" so that a given law no longer applies. We will deal with each of those issues in turn.

1. Does the Bible give us any guidance when two major duties (or laws) seemingly come into conflict with each other? Should I work on Sabbath, for example, in order to relieve human suffering? to keep my job?

Should I ever dishonor my parents in order to honor God? Should I tell a lie in order to save one person's life and to prevent another from committing murder?

In simple albeit painful form, the law pyramid aids us in precisely such circumstances. When two lesser laws seem to clash, we appeal to a higher level. In a sinful world, conflict is possible at every level below the one great command. For example, should one obey God or parents (first commandment versus fifth)? Should one preserve life or tell the truth (sixth commandment versus ninth)? Only careful, prayerful weighing of the ten in the light of the two and in the light of the one will yield an answer.

In this connection, however, we should recognize that a careful reading of Scripture can give us more assistance than we might realize. A grasp of two elements is essential: (1) the precise meaning of the letter of the law in its original context and (2) a knowledge of the motivating spirit behind the law.

Narrowing the Letter, Broadening the Spirit

To understand biblical laws properly, one must first look rigorously at the letter of the law in its original context. That is, we must "narrow the letter." A close reading of the text, for example, reveals that the command not to kill refers to first-degree murder (Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 35:9-28). It clearly does not exclude the civil death penalty (Ex. 21:15-17), killing done in national defense (Deut. 20:10-18), or killing done in immediate self-defense (Ex. 22:2, 3).

Similarly, the command against bearing false witness, when we "narrow the letter," clearly refers to the telling of falsehoods with the *intent to injure* innocent people. One passage specifies the penalty for false witness: "Then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother" (Deut. 19:19). This places a different light on the Hebrew midwives' misleading words to Pharaoh (Ex. 1:19), Samuel's shading of the truth to Saul (1 Sam. 16:1-3), and David's use of Hushai against Absalom (2 Sam. 16, 17).

It is not enough, however, to "narrow the letter." We must also "broaden the spirit," moving beyond the external code into the heart. Then killing is broadened to include angry words (Matt. 5:21, 22), adultery includes lustful thoughts (verses 27, 28), and false witness covers even the misuse of the truth to hurt others. In the words of Ellen White: "Even the intentional suppression of truth, by which injury may result to others, is

a violation of the ninth commandment" (PP, p. 309).

In short, circumstances may arise when telling the truth or refusing to kill could mean disobeying the letter of God's law. One thing is clear, however: *God never asks us to BREAK His law. Our every act must be an obedient one, in full harmony with His law.* That is true even if we are called to kill.

You may ask, at this point: Is this situation ethics? Certainly not, if understood in the popular sense of "excuse for sinning"! God never asks us to sin, or even "allows" us to sin. His only call is to obedience. If we think we can use the law pyramid to excuse sin and to do as we please, then we have thoroughly misunderstood and misapplied it.

Admittedly, what I have outlined is a sophisticated approach to the law, one that requires a rather advanced level of mental and Christian maturity. We would not expect young children or new Christians to be able to function at that level. For that very reason, God has given rules and adaptations—a codebook, if you please—for those who need them. And the church, as the body of Christ, responsible for believers of every shape and capability, will always have a list of rules to get us started, so to speak.

The original reasons for progressively adapting law to human need are paralleled in the church today. A brief glimpse at those original circumstances can help us properly apply the law pyramid, for it was that progressive adaptation of the law to human need that gave rise to the pyramid in the first place.

Origin and Application of the Law Pyramid

The pyramid formed by the one, the two, and the ten portrays the abiding, eternal principles of God's kingdom, applied with increasing specificity to God's world on the basis of *need*. The ten are clearly an adaptation of God's law to a *sinful* world. What would our first parents have thought if God had told them: "Honour thy father and thy mother" or "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"? Indeed, *before sin* they surely would have been puzzled by prohibitions against killing, stealing, and bearing false witness.

A perfect world needs no written law. Mature creatures in a perfect environment understand the full nuances of the one great law of love, even if it is nowhere spelled out. In this respect, Ellen White offers a revealing description of the heavenly scene before sin entered: "When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of" (MB, p. 109).

In Scripture the return to a "law-free" world is suggested by Jeremiah's new covenant promise. When God writes his law upon the heart, "No longer shall each man teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest" (Jer. 31:34).

A perfect world is only law-free in the sense that no written external law is necessary. Everything and everyone are so steeped in the law of love that the right response has become automatic. That is the way it is with a skilled typist, cellist, pianist, pilot, tennis player: the "law" is written in the mind, heart, and fingers. That was and is God's ideal. And a committed Christian can begin to approach that kind of sensitivity *in this life* as the Spirit works on heart and mind. It is not, however, a process that happens immediately. It takes time.

But then note the impact of sin. Selfishness adds a nasty twist to everything human. Our ability to think is distorted. And in time, not only are our motives unreliable; even the basic knowledge necessary for good decisions disappears.

From the standpoint of biblical history, after the Fall, the human family continued to deteriorate in every respect. By the time of Abraham, even his own family served "other gods" (Joshua 24:2). Why did God allow it? We may surmise, based on the book of Job, that God was giving Satan the opportunity to try his hand at running a world—based on the principle of selfishness. And Satan did very well—though he actually ended up proving the point that God had made about selfishness all along.

In these circumstances, God's response to human need tells us something about the purpose and function of law. Ellen White describes God's progressive adaptation of His law to human need in words that are almost startling: "If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai, or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses" (PP, p. 364).

As suggested in the above quotation, even the Ten Commandments

were late in coming—at least in the form in which we have them. Nor were the Ten Commandments enough. After being immersed for hundreds of years in paganism, Israel could not grasp the one, the two, or the ten. Again the words of Ellen White are instructive: "The minds of the people, blinded and debased by slavery and heathenism, were not prepared to appreciate fully the far-reaching principles of God's ten precepts. That the obligations of the Decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the principles of the Ten Commandments" (PP, p. 310).

Significantly, Israel did not consider these laws burdensome. When Ellen White observes that the Mosaic laws "proceeded from no exercise of mere arbitrary sovereignty; all were given for the good of Israel" (PP, p. 311), she is simply reflecting the hearty appreciation for law found in the Old Testament. Moses' voice is tinged with awe as he exclaims: "What great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:8). In the Old Testament, *God's law is good news, not bad; it is a positive guide to life, not an instrument of condemnation.*

A codebook is necessary and helpful at the early levels of growth. If, however, we stay at that level, constructing a massive codebook and attempting to add up and obey all the divine commands ever given, even extracting them from their original historical context in a conscientious attempt to obey, we risk burnout, anger, and despair. In the words of Peter, law becomes a burden that "neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10). My suspicion is that the love-hate relationship toward law as described by Paul in Romans 7 has similar roots. And if we take our understanding of law only from Paul, in isolation from the rest of Scripture, it is too easy to depict law as the bad news, an instrument of condemnation from which grace, the good news, saves us.

Both Paul and Peter struggled with law because of the Jewish tendency to turn it into a rigid codebook. Martin Luther faced the same battle because of the codebook approach in medieval Catholicism. And today Adventists struggle because we have turned Ellen White's counsel into a codebook, a burden that "neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear."

A casebook approach to law recovers the original setting and enables us to see law in its original gracious and practical intent, without attempting to impose eternal validity on every specific law that God gave. We may summarize a key point right here: *the positive principles*

embedded in the one, the two, and the ten are absolute and enduring, but the specific applications are not.

One of Jesus' statements is significant in this connection. In Matthew 19:3-9 (see also Mark 10:1-12), He addresses the divorce issue in response to a question from the Pharisees. As far as I know, it is the only biblical passage that spells out explicitly the principle of accommodation or adaptation that we have been discussing. In brief, Jesus notes that divorce was not part of God's original plan. God intended man and wife to be one forever. Sin made the law of divorce necessary. "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8).

Was the law of divorce bad? No. Given the circumstances of sin, it was good. The same could be said of a whole list of laws that were good *given the sinful conditions they addressed.* I would include here the laws on slavery, bigamy, and blood vengeance. Studying those laws in their original context ("narrowing the letter") and seeking to understand how they apply eternal principles in a particular time and place, we can gain insight into many difficult and analogous circumstances that we face today.

But information is never enough. *The law pyramid is only effective in helping us fulfill God's will when we are in active contact with God through prayer.* Bible study and prayer must go hand in hand. Otherwise our crooked, sinful hearts will lead us astray through crooked and subtly perverse motives.

And right here I want to be uncommonly blunt. I recognize that many would consider the view of law presented in this chapter to be quite dangerous. Knowing that, I never could have mustered the courage to put it into black and white if it had not been for Ellen White's suggestive hints, especially in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. It was she who provided me not only the basic ideas but also the necessary "social support" and the "plausibility structures" that enabled me to spell out the implications of the law pyramid.

But it would be quite unfair to her and to the church not to emphasize the key element that makes the law pyramid functional and Christian. As I indicated in the previous chapter, it is not enough simply to know the material, even if it is Scripture. *We must know God if we are to understand and apply Scripture properly.* Note how Ellen White makes that point: "Those who do not learn every day in the school of Christ, who do not spend much time in earnest prayer, are not fit to handle the work of God

in any of its branches; for if they do, human depravity will surely overcome them and they will lift up their souls unto vanity (TM, p. 169).

This is the "daily dying to self" of traditional Methodist piety. It is the ongoing necessity of being "crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20) daily and continually until He returns. Let us be frank: without Christ a casebook approach to law is dangerous, though perhaps not as dangerous as a codebook approach without Him. But either way, any attempt to obey without a living relationship with Him is fraught with eternal danger.

2. Does the Bible help us know when times have changed so that some laws given by God no longer apply? "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death" (Ex. 21:17). "You shall not permit a sorceress to live" (Ex. 22:18). "Whoever sacrifices to any god, save to the Lord only, shall be utterly destroyed" (verse 20). Circumcision. Blood vengeance. Slavery. You may eat all you want from your neighbor's vineyard as long as you don't carry any produce away in a container (Deut. 23:24). A newly married man is to have a year free to be home with his wife (Deut. 24:5).

Who decides when and how such laws are laid aside? One thing is clear: we do not have a "Thus saith the Lord" to mark the end for each law. While *we* can appeal to the New Testament in some instances, that was no help for Jesus and the disciples. All they had was the Old Testament. Even if we argue that many Old Testament laws came to an end at the cross, the New Testament gives us no clear guide as to which laws were "nailed to the cross." Indeed, the New Testament reveals that even the apostles struggled long and hard over the matter. (See discussion of Acts 15 in chapter 9.)

Adventists may be inclined to rely on Ellen White's writings. But that simply pushes the question to a different level: How did she know what laws were binding and which ones were not?

By visions? That's a dangerous argument. Have we not said that visions are to be tested by Scripture? "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20, KJV). To reverse ourselves and claim that later revelation is the final word on the former revelation sets a dangerous precedent.

A casebook approach, however, allows us to appeal to *enduring principles* as the touchstone for our daily activities, our rules, our norms. Each "case" from Scripture contributes to our understanding of the enduring principles as we see how God has applied them in different times and places.

The care and prayer that such an approach requires may seem too hard

for some. They may be tempted to throw up their hands in dismay and fall back to a codebook position, claiming that all God's laws are equally binding under all circumstances. Such an approach, however, often leads to a desperate echo of Peter's speech at the Jerusalem General Conference: "Why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).

Peter and the Jerusalem council moved toward the casebook approach, recognizing that specific applications and laws may come and go, depending on time and circumstances. To be sure, that approach, if it is to be Christian, requires a great deal of study, discussion, and prayer. But I do not believe we can avoid the hard truth contained in Ellen White's statement: "Sharp contentions over the Bible have led to investigation and revealed the precious jewels of truth. Many tears have been shed, many prayers offered, that the Lord would open the understanding to His Word" (1SM, p. 20).

Old Testament Examples of Changing Times

We can find no easy solution to the problem of changing times and laws. But what we can do is recognize the facts from Scripture, namely, that laws and practices *do* change with the times, even within the bounds marked by the Old Testament. Three uncomfortable examples from Deuteronomy 23 illustrate the point.

1. Eunuchs—

Excluded	*Included*
"He whose testicles are crushed or whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:1).	"Let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.' For thus says the Lord: 'To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off' " (Isa. 56:3-5).

There is some evidence to suggest that male castration was a sacred fertility rite among the Canaanites. Originally, the biblical prohibition no

doubt served as an emphatic safeguard, preserving Israel from deadly and misleading worship practices. When the threat had passed, the law was no longer needed. Hence the beautiful *inclusive* promise from Isaiah.

2. Bastards—

Excluded

"No bastard shall enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the assembly of the Lord" (Deut. 23:2).

Included

"Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the *son of a harlot*. . . . Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, 'If you bring me home again to fight with the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head.' And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'The Lord will be witness between us.' . . . *Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah*" (Judges 11:1, 9-10, 29).

Whatever the reasons for stressing the purity and wholeness of the community (thus excluding bastards), those reasons were overruled in the appointment of Jephthah as judge. The original law no doubt was intended to put some backbone into an otherwise promiscuous community. Scripture itself reveals, however, that this particular law was not part of a rigid codebook.

3. Moabites—

Excluded

"No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; even to the tenth generation none belonging to them shall enter the assembly of the Lord for ever" (Deut. 23:3).

"*In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab*. . . . And I contended with them and cursed them and beat some of them

Included

"Also *Ruth the Moabitess*, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance. . . . *So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife*; and he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. . . . They named him Obed; he was the father of Jesse, the father of David" (Ruth 4:10-17).

"And Salmon the father of Boaz

and pulled out their hair; and *I made them take oath* in the name of God, saying, '*You shall not* give your daughters to their sons, or *take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves*' " (Neh. 13:23, 25).

by Rahab, and *Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth*, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king." "And Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, *of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ*" (Matt. 1:5, 6, 16).

According to the historical setting in Scripture, the law against Moabites was given in the days of Moses, ignored in the days of the judges (when Ruth was brought into the royal line), invoked again after the exile during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, then overlooked or overruled again in the genealogy of Jesus.

The original purpose of the law undoubtedly had to do with preserving the purity of the faith against the threats from surrounding pagan nations. In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, for example, we know from extrabiblical sources (Elephantine Papyri) that Jews in Egypt had built a temple in which Yahweh, the God of Israel, was given a feminine consort, a wife, no less. Given that kind of accommodation to the surrounding culture, one could understand why Ezra and Nehemiah saw reason to invoke those laws again that maintained a clear distinction between Israel and her pagan neighbors.

In each of these three cases, the exceptions occur *within* the Old Testament itself, not at the cross. Traditional codebook thinking is inclined to continue all the Old Testament laws of this kind up to the cross, bringing them to a clean and tidy conclusion with the death of Christ. The cross no doubt made a difference with some laws. But it had nothing to do with the exceptions made for eunuchs, bastards, and Moabites.

In short, a casebook approach to law is already evident in the Old Testament. The New Testament simply continues in that same pattern.

As I have watched students and church members struggle with the question of how to deal with biblical law, I have observed one great fear again and again: recognizing exceptions openly and explicitly somehow seems to jeopardize the whole system of law. Again it is the domino effect, the slippery slope, the camel's nose under the tent. We meet that fear again and again.

To alleviate that fear, let me suggest, first of all, that the enduring and absolute elements in the law pyramid (in the one, the two, and the ten) provide rock-solid protection against compromise and collapse. In a sense,

we do have a codebook at a basic, principled level. The one, the two, and the ten represent positive and enduring principles that stand clearly above and beyond any of the other temporary or lesser applications.

Those who worry that the Sabbath might disappear should note that the Sabbath is one of the ten, not one of the additional laws that are conditioned by time and culture. Only a Sabbathkeeping group can articulate a consistent view of the law pyramid. Adventists have an opportunity that we should not squander. Indeed, we have a responsibility to share that we dare not shirk.

Second, we must recognize how a casebook approach based on eternal principles radically changes our "religious reasons." Instead of responding to a specific but limited number of items on a checklist for "religious reasons" while we do as we please with the rest of our life, we have committed our lives to the one great command. And we have done it for "religious reasons." That commitment transforms every act into an act of obedience for "religious reasons."

This wholistic perspective means that God may call us to lay aside a command that He once gave. But it would be consistent with all that He has asked us to do. And our response would be in obedience to Him and His law.

Our inclination toward codebook thinking makes this a difficult point to accept. One way to help us clarify our thinking, however, is to press the comparison between the Adventist and the Orthodox approaches to diet.

Two Perspectives on Diet

Some years ago I took my Hebrew class to Portland, Oregon, to make the rounds of several synagogues. After the Sabbath morning Orthodox service, the synagogue president met with the class for additional comments, questions, and answers. He was obviously proud of his Jewish heritage, making a special point of his family's adherence to kosher food laws. "In the Jewish frat house at the University of Washington," he said, "my son is the only one who lives kosher. And at our home," he added, "we have six sets of dishes, three for everyday use and three for festivals. In each cluster of three, one set is for food containing meat, another for food with milk, and another for food that contains neither."

Impulsively one of our students blurted out, "Why not just be a vegetarian? It would be a lot easier." That was like asking an Adventist "Why not just keep Sunday? It would be a lot easier."

The synagogue president stared at him, momentarily speechless. Then

with a certain cockiness, replied, "There are 613 laws in the Mishnah [the codification of Jewish traditional law], and I dare say one of them is 'Thou shalt eat meat.' "

Obviously, vegetarianism held no attraction for him, nor was he worried about convenience. The six sets of dishes had to do with divine law, and he intended to obey. Which law? "You shall not boil a kid in his mother's milk" (Ex. 23:19; Deut. 14:21). The multiple sets of dishes are linked with the traditional Jewish prohibition against eating meat and milk products together, a tradition based on that biblical command.

Before we consider whether it is valid for today, we might be inclined to ask why the law was given originally. Not so for the Orthodox Jew. God has spoken; the people obey.

Adventists tend to look for rational, health-related reasons for the laws we still consider relevant. Why not eat unclean animals (Lev. 11; Deut. 14)? Because they are scavengers, thus more likely to carry disease. Why not eat the blood of animals (Lev. 17:10-16)? Because blood carries the impurities.

Those *modern, rational* explanations *may* have been in God's mind when He gave the commands, but He did not find it necessary to share such reasons with Israel. The Bible itself does not appeal to health as a rationale for Mosaic legislation. As far as Israel was concerned, the original prohibitions were religious in nature. They were to be holy as God was holy. God had spoken. No further explanation was needed. That is typical for an authoritarian culture and to be expected in a community of ex-slaves.

Similarly, Scripture does not explain why the Israelites should not boil a kid in its mother's milk. Until the recovery of some ancient Palestinian texts suggested that the practice may have been linked with Canaanite fertility rites, we really had no good explanation that could satisfy the modern mind. But now we can see that the fertility symbolism suggested by the rite could have been an excellent reason for the prohibition. One could conclude, therefore, that the law had meaning in that ancient culture, but not in ours, a line of reasoning similar to that found in Acts 15, where circumcision is seen as relevant for Christians of Jewish origin, but not for those with Gentile roots.

For a devout Orthodox Jew, however (the synagogue president, for example), neither convenience nor the argument from Canaanite culture makes the slightest difference. God has spoken. The matter is settled. All God's laws constitute an absolute and enduring codebook.

Orthodox Jewish tradition enhances the status of that codebook even further by claiming that Jewish oral tradition originated at Mount Sinai along with the Ten Commandments, even though from a historical point of view the oral tradition was not formally codified in the Mishnah until the second to fifth centuries *after* Christ. To the Orthodox mind, all laws given by God are of equal and enduring value.

It is the Mishnah that contains the traditional Jewish interpretation of the meat-with-milk law (see tractate Hullin 8:4). Herbert Danby, in his introduction to his standard English edition of the Mishnah, describes how the traditional Jew views all the laws of Moses as being part of a single divine revelation: "All are part of the inspired Word of God; the scrupulous fulfillment of the laws about Fringes and Phylacteries is as much a fulfilling of God's purpose as abstention from idolatry and murder. Granted the acceptance of the Written Law as God's will for Israel, Israel's teachers had not the right to determine the relative importance of this or that injunction. Therefore the Oral Law preserves with equal piety customs and decisions arising out of the 'lightest' as out of the 'weightiest' precepts of the Law revealed to Israel at Sinai" (Danby, p. xvii).

Now, it may very well be that most Adventists treat the prohibition against unclean animals as a permanent religious injunction. In other words, they include it in a codebook along with the Ten Commandments, a kind of eleventh commandment, if you please. While we may *say* that health reasons lie behind the prohibition, our actions reveal a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, codebook thinking leads us to check labels for animal fat, while we overlook other ingredients that actually are more dangerous from strictly a health perspective. On the other hand, most Adventists have enough casebook thinking in their blood so that they would *not* ask a hostess whether her baked goods were made with lard or with vegetable shortening. We would ask about the ham in the sandwich, but not about the lard. Isn't that the way it works? At the lower "invisible" level we are more likely to be pragmatic and follow Paul's counsel: "Eat, asking no question for conscience' sake" (1 Cor. 10:27, KJV).

Contrast that halfway position with that of the prominent Jewish theologian who visited the campus of one of our Adventist universities. The staff bent every effort to cater to his kosher preferences. They found the right kind of dishes, even washed them in an autoclave in order to avoid unnecessary contaminants. Then they brought him good kosher food—or so they thought.

Their guest looked at the meal and then asked about the sauce. The

staff could not answer. "Bring me the can," he asked. They complied. He carefully read the label. "Aha," he finally said, "I thought that might be the case. I cannot eat it." And the whole meal was tossed out.

He was being consistent with his codebook approach. No exceptions. Ever.

Now let's press the Adventist stance. If the *real* reason behind the prohibition is health, then it is simply an extension of the sixth command: "Thou shalt not kill." It is a practical first step to help us know how to keep that command, especially if one is in the desert where food cannot be cooked properly. Put positively, the sixth command tells us: "Do everything possible to enhance and preserve life. As for diet, eat the best food available."

Following that casebook approach based on eternal principles, I would choose—if necessary—whole-wheat crackers made with lard over rotten carrots, over rare beefsteak, and possibly over a piece of pecan pie. The rotten carrots would be out in anyone's book; my lifelong vegetarian habits would make the beefsteak impossible for me, even if it weren't rare; the pecan pie would be acceptable at almost any Adventist potluck, but might not be the best food available.

Given my fourth-generation Adventist roots, it would never be easy for me *knowingly* to eat something baked with lard; and for health reasons, vegetable shortening is clearly superior. But what should I eat if I adopt a course of action based on principle?

Some fear that Adventists would rush out and load up on all manner of unclean meats. If that were to happen, it would be the clearest proof possible that we were not acting from principle. Knowing all that we do, a principled approach would strengthen our vegetarian habits and make us healthier people. God would be pleased, and we would live longer, happier lives. And that is what law is all about.

There would be other changes in Adventist ways, too. Instead of simply avoiding the movie theater yet watching anything and everything on video at home, we would become much more careful about what we watched anywhere. Instead of prohibiting chess, checkers, and playing cards while avidly participating in all-night bashes of Monopoly and Rook, we would reconsider all our entertainment habits. Instead of insisting on noncombatancy status in the army but at the same time devouring our friends in the church through evil speaking, we would become more sensitive to any act or word that destroys life.

In short, we would no longer simply tithe the mint, dill, and cummin

while neglecting the truly important principles on which the law is based.

Summary: A Casebook Approach Based on Eternal Principles

The following summary includes the crucial elements in the casebook approach developed in this chapter.

1. Commitment to the one great law of self-sacrificing love makes every act moral and religious. Christians committed to a wholistic way of life under God cannot make a list of acts that they do for "religious reasons" while leaving the rest of life untouched.

2. The biblical concept of the pyramid of laws means that some laws are more important than others, with the one great command of self-sacrificing love the supreme law over all. In a sinful world, conflicts between commands may develop at every level below the one great command. Conflicts are resolved through appeal to the higher command.

3. The eternal and absolute principles are embodied in the one, the two, and the ten. All other laws are gracious applications of or first steps toward those principles and may change with time and culture. Many issues deserve greater attention under this heading.

a. Clean and unclean animals. Is it a gracious first step under the sixth command, "Thou shalt not kill"?

b. Tithing. Is it a gracious first step under the first command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"?

c. Death penalty. The Old Testament mandates the death penalty for breaking each of the Ten Commandments except the tenth ("Thou shalt not covet"). Although these penalties are not included in the Decalogue itself, are they God's way of reinforcing the seriousness of His commands? If so, what does that mean for our modern culture?

d. Religious rites, festivals, and sacrifices. Surely the Old Testament practices tell us something about God. Should we take them more seriously as a means of broadening our understanding of the first four commands?

4. Some potential conflicts between commands may be alleviated by "narrowing the letter," that is, by carefully studying the original context and application of the law and by "broadening the spirit," which means noting the motivating spirit and principle behind each law. The motives behind specific acts do make a difference. Accidental killing does not fall under the letter or the spirit of the sixth commandment. The New Testament makes it clear, however, that hatred does constitute breaking of the command, even if it does not result in actual killing.

5. Prayer. constant communion with God, is essential to the proper application of the law pyramid. It is not enough to know the laws of Scripture or their historical context, as helpful as that information might be. The Christian must know God. In a perfect world, written law is not necessary because the law of God is engraved on the heart. En route to the perfect communion which that condition assumes, obedience is only possible as we ask Him to cleanse our lives, our thoughts, and our motives. A casebook approach based on eternal principles is only possible when we are in touch with the great Lawgiver Himself.

Excursus A: The Biblical Basis for the Law Pyramid

The Centrality of the One, the Two, and the Ten

NOTE: While the key elements of the Law Pyramid are present in the Old Testament, the New Testament clearly sharpens the focus and provides the perspective that shapes the Law Pyramid. The following texts contribute to the understanding of the One, the Two, and the Ten as the universal and enduring elements in Scripture.

Leviticus 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."

Deuteronomy 6:4-5: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."

Matthew 7:12: "So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."

Matthew 19:16-21: "And behold, one came up to him, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do, to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? One there is who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not kill, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'All these I have observed; what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'"

Matthew 22:35-40: "And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first

commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.'"

Mark 10:17-21: "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "Do not kill, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother." ' And he said to him, 'Teacher, all these I have observed from my youth.' And Jesus looking upon him loved him, and said to him, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' "

Mark 12:28-31: "And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'"

Luke 10:25-28: "And behold a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read?' And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have answered right; do this, and you will live.'"

Luke 18:18-22: "And a ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother."' And he said, 'All these I have observed from my youth.' And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, 'One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.'"

John 13:34, 35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

John 14:21: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me."

John 15:10: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love."

John 15:12: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

John 15:17: "This I command you, to love one another."

Romans 13:8-10: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

1 Corinthians 13: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

Galatians 5:13-14: "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "

James 2:8-12: "If you really fulfil the royal law, according to the

Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' said also, 'Do not kill.' If you do not commit adultery but do kill, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty."

1 John 2:3-11: "And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He who says 'I know him' but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment which you had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new commandment, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling. But he who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes."

1 John 3:10-18: "By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth."

1 John 3:23: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

1 John 4:7-12: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and

he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

1 John 4:16-21: "So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love because he first loved us. If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also."

1 John 5:1-3: "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome."

2 John 5-6: "And now I beg you, lady, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we follow his commandments; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning that you follow love."

Excursus B:
Ellen White's Commentary on the Nature of Law

Adaptation and Restoration of the Ideal Law of Love

BEFORE SIN IN HEAVEN, THE ANGELS WERE VIRTUALLY UNAWARE OF LAW. "But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy" (MB, p. 109).

BEFORE SIN ON EARTH, THE LAW WAS WRITTEN ON HUMAN

HEARTS. "Adam and Eve, at their creation, had a knowledge of the law of God; they were acquainted with its claims upon them; its precepts were written upon their hearts. When man fell by transgression, the law was not changed, but a remedial system was established to bring him back to obedience" (PP, p. 363).

AS HUMANKIND FELL AWAY FROM GOD, THE LAW WAS ADAPTED TO NEED: "If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai, or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses" (PP, p. 364).

THE DECALOGUE APPLIED THE PRINCIPLES OF LOVE: "The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellowman; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love. 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength and with all thy mind and thy neighbor as thyself' (Luke 10:27). In the ten commandments, these principles are carried out in detail and made applicable to the condition and circumstances of man" (PP, p. 305).

ADDITIONAL LAWS ILLUMINED THE PRINCIPLES OF THE DECALOGUE: "The minds of the people, blinded and debased by slavery and heathenism, were not prepared to appreciate fully the far-reaching principles of God's ten precepts. That the obligations of the Decalogue might be more fully understood and enforced, additional precepts were given, illustrating and applying the principles of the Ten Commandments" (PP, p. 310).

ALL THE LAWS WERE FOR THE GOOD OF THE PEOPLE: "The object of all these regulations was stated: they proceeded from no exercise of arbitrary sovereignty; all were given for the good of Israel" (PP, p. 311).

THE LAW IS AGAIN INTERNALIZED: "The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone, is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart" (PP, p, 372).

PART THREE

Illustrations:

The Problems Are the Solutions

▼

Introduction to Part III: The Problems Are the Solutions

One of the readers who saw this book in manuscript form said that he liked the first half, but not the second—the theory sounded good until he saw it in practice! Actually, I have been thinking about pronouncing a woe on anyone who attempts to read the "Illustrations" in Part III without first having read the "Documents" in Part I and "The Case for a 'Practical' Approach to Inspiration" in Part II. Now—if you've done all that and if Part III still sounds ominous, I would suggest going back for another hard look at Parts I and II. Let me explain.

Since not everyone in the world is beautiful in the physical sense, many of us will have dear friends who are quite ordinary-looking people. As disinterested onlookers, we conceivably could describe them as plain or even homely. But with the passing of time and the deepening of friendship, the homeliness seems to disappear. And then it actually becomes part of a new beauty.

The same thing can happen with a house when it becomes a home. The building may not appear physically beautiful at first, but as we settle in, it becomes home. In time some of its less-than-attractive features begin to take on a new and different beauty, and may actually come closest to the heart.

Part III of this book is like that. Some of the illustrations may appear less than beautiful to some. And yet I know that in time they can become part of a new and deeper beauty. I know because that is what they have become for me.

More than anything else, I want the Bible to move from being that

Perfect-Book-on-the-Shelf to being that Practical-Book-in-the-Hand—a much-read letter from a dear Friend. But making that transition is not always easy, just as it is not easy for a young boy to make the painful discovery that his dad isn't the strongest man in town after all. Yet that discovery may be the necessary first step to discovering the ideal dad.

As I continue to work with the topic of inspiration, I am increasingly impressed that our Adventist heritage has put us in a marvelous position to articulate a *practical* approach to inspiration as a clear alternative to the *theoretical* model that has dominated Western thinking ever since the Enlightenment. The message we have heard from the beginning is that we should love one another (1 John 3:11). That is not the language of science or philosophy, but the language of relationship and experience, the language of the family. We can learn a great deal from philosophy and science. They represent the best of human efforts to understand and describe our world. But by their very nature they can satisfy neither our emotional need for love nor our psychological need for stability.

With reference to the first, Ellen White observed: "We need to clasp a hand that is warm, to trust in a heart full of tenderness. And even so God has in His word revealed Himself" (Ed, p. 133). Can the brilliant logic of philosophy or the precision instruments of science mediate that kind of experience to us? It would be unfair even to ask.

As for our need of stability, science is no longer worshiped with the same intensity as the infallible guarantor of truth. A sober assessment of what happens both in philosophy and science reveals such rapidly changing fashions in both disciplines that publishers can scarcely keep up. Science textbooks in particular are doomed to be outdated the moment they are published. It is high time that we question the right of science to judge Scripture. But we should also probe our own tendency to rely on scientific arguments to "prove" the divine origin of Scripture. In science, today's orthodoxy very easily turns into tomorrow's heresy. If belief in God and His Word is tied to a particular scientific position, Christian young people will be at risk when the discovery of science's fallibility puts faith on the slippery slope as well. Ellen White bequeathed us a great truth when she exclaimed: "God and heaven alone are infallible" (CWE, p. 37).

I am convinced that in our eagerness to defend Scripture we have been preoccupied with the logical and theoretical concerns of the Enlightenment. The experiential and practical aspects of Scripture have been neglected in favor of the cold rationality of logical and scientific proofs. The Bible has not been able to speak its own message.

If Scripture can speak for itself, however, the theoretical recedes in favor of the practical as the focus shifts to the realm of *relationship* and *experience*. In short, Scripture is more like a family letter, and less like a philosophical treatise or scientific report. The rigorous logic and careful methods of testing, characteristic of modern philosophy and science, can help us in our pursuit of truth, but they are not the ultimate test of Scripture nor of our relationship with God. In the book *Education,* Ellen White describes the exhilarating experience that results when Scripture broadens our horizons to perceive more of God's goodness: "This experience is the highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible" (Ed, p. 172).

Now if experience is that significant, the implications of another Ellen White quotation become even more important: "The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes" (1SM, p. 20).

In short, Scripture is down to earth and is in some sense "imperfect." Typically, orthodox defenders of Scripture have been reluctant to describe Scripture as "imperfect," for that was the very grounds on which Enlightenment critics rejected it as Scripture. The course of the debate has shown that both sides share the assumption that if Scripture is not perfect in some absolute sense, it could not be from God. On the one hand, the critics have pointed to seeming imperfections, concluding therefrom that Scripture could not be from God. Many have taken the next step and also denied the existence of God.

On the other hand, the devout defenders of the faith, sensing their need of God much more keenly that the critics and fearing the results of seeing what the critics say they have seen, often have continued to defend the traditional view of "absolute perfection." Thus, both critics and defenders have been operating with the same assumption: the Bible must be perfect or it is not from God. The model presented here adopts the position that the Bible presents a *practical* perfection rather than an *absolute* one, an approach that is much more at home with the Bible as family letter than with the Bible as philosophical treatise or scientific report.

In reaction against an ecclesiastical authority that claimed the right to determine truth by proclamation rather than by demonstration, the

Enlightenment set out to demonstrate "truth" in every area of life, but without God. Its optimistic assessment of human reason and ability continued well into the 20th century. Only when the implications of World War I began to sink in did more sober alternatives begin to take hold.

Conservative defenders of the faith, meanwhile, continued to argue along traditional authoritarian lines. But now, instead of simply insisting that Scripture was absolute, they felt compelled by the Enlightenment mindset to argue that Scripture was also "according to the facts" as perceived by modern science. Thus the remarkable situation developed in which believers attempted to prove the inviolability of the divine in Scripture on the basis of human arguments and scientific evidence.

Now when we do battle on Enlightenment turf and according to Enlightenment rules, we inevitably focus on *theoretical* concerns, thereby significantly compromising our ability to perceive Scripture's *practical* purpose. Indeed, some of the very steps that are necessary to reach human beings where they are *cannot be integrated into the traditional theoretical model of the unity of Scripture.* Measured against such a model they appear *contradictory.* But those same aspects, because they are designed to meet differing human needs under differing circumstances, fit beautifully into a *practical* model focusing on a single *motivational* goal: winning over a wide variety of human beings to God's law of love. That which is a problem from one perspective turns into a solution from another. Instead of avoiding the difficulties or arguing that they really don't exist, we look at them more closely, discovering how they fit into a *practical* approach. Scripture constantly corrects our theory. We no longer feel bound to a preconceived idea of how God should have revealed Himself. Scripture can speak for itself.

The seriousness of our task should not be underestimated. For until we clarify how and why our model differs so dramatically from the traditional one, communication with those who assume the old model will not be easy. I find it remarkable and encouraging, however, that Adventist Christians everywhere are living out the implications of the simple, practical approach described in this book. We have always said that the one great command, the two great commands, and the ten, stand out with a higher order of validity than the rest of the commands of Scripture. They are the truly universal elements. In spite of occasional strong voices insisting that the authority of the Word will collapse if we do not have an explicit "thus saith the Lord" for our every act, Christians have, in time, laid aside bigamy, blood vengeance, and slavery, and all without an explicit

"Thus saith the Lord." In the New Testament, the first Christians also laid aside circumcision, previously mandated by a clear "thus saith the Lord" (Gen. 17:9-14), because the Spirit led them to consider it in light of higher principles and to recognize that it did not apply universally. (See discussion of Acts 15 in chapter 9.)

The dangers of rampant rationalization are minimized by the inherent stability of the law pyramid. And by proclaiming the validity of the Decalogue, *including the Sabbath command,* Adventists have avoided the inconsistency that has plagued the Protestant world in general. Without the Sabbath to anchor the ten in place, Protestants slide down the slippery slope toward a rational modernism, only to be jerked back by an authoritarian fundamentalism. The powerful simplicity of the law pyramid, consistent with what has been the thrust of the Adventist message from the first, enables Adventists to recognize more readily that which is enduring in Scripture and that which is adapted to time and place. By God's grace, we can preserve a practical approach to Scripture that strikes a middle course between the modernist and fundamentalist extremes.

To a large extent, *this book simply describes the approach to Christian living that Adventists have always practiced but simply have been reluctant to admit in print.* If anything is unusual, then, it is the candor with which the "illustrations" are laid out. Scripture is a source of strength to human beings precisely because of the way God has used a variety of human voices to meet varying human needs. Why not simply be honest and describe those very features of Scripture that make it so effective, but which we have been afraid to admit because we were running scared from Enlightenment critics? I have found that the approach presented here provides a welcome common ground that draws together otherwise disparate elements of the church. It appeals to "liberals" and "conservatives" alike, allowing the openness to the human in Scripture, as stressed by the "liberals" but within a secure framework ensuring wholehearted recognition of God's presence and action, as stressed by the "conservatives." If both needs are met, the church will be strengthened immeasurably in its ability to fulfill its mission to the world, for then it will witness effectively to both Greeks and barbarians, to the wise and the foolish (cf. Rom. 1:14).

Familiarity with Ellen White's writings positively conditions thoughtful Adventists to recognize that here is a theory that accords with practice, one that enables us to take seriously our relationship with God, with the world, and with Scripture, and to be honest with all three. If what I

describe is indeed common ground, then we will be able to move forward with our mission to the world, being all things to all people so that we might save some (1 Cor. 9:22), but doing so from within a God-given framework that protects us from damaging compromise.

In Part III we will look at many "human" features of the Bible put to skillful use by God in communicating His will to the human family. If human frailty could not be used to the glory of God, He certainly would have chosen a more effective means. But He has elected to use human weakness as a bridge between the Almighty and His fallen creation. To quote Ellen White: "The Lord gave His Word in just the way He wanted it to come" (1SM, p. 21).

As I have worked through these various features of Scripture, I have discovered more and more reasons why that which originally appeared as a liability is actually an ideal adaptation to human needs. I have also discovered, however, that some features of the biblical text that now are most exciting to me may be quite frightening for some of my students, at least on first exposure. So we have good reason to be cautious and to give ourselves time. The assumptions underlying the theoretical approach to inspiration can be so deeply engrained that making the adjustment to a practical approach sometimes comes very hard. Intellect is not a key factor; the depth of early "imprinting" often is.

One ground rule is worth noting. It has to do with the use of vocabulary. When I came to this point in the process of writing, I asked my computer to go back and check the completed chapters for the use of three words: "error," "mistake," and "contradiction." My goal has been to eliminate those words from my vocabulary when talking about Scripture—with just one exception: I use them to explain why I do *not* use them.

In the preface I refer briefly to the problem caused by such words. Basically, they are unfriendly characters who don't feel at home with people we love. Words are strange creatures, and we should use them with care. In Britain the word "homely" is a compliment to a woman. In America it most assuredly is not. A man may be ugly and a woman skinny, but if we love them, we will prefer something like the words "rugged" for him and "slender" for her.

In some instances the very same trait can be described positively or negatively, depending on our bias. Those we like "stand firm for conviction"; whereas those we despise are "rigid and unbending." At the other

end of the temperament scale a friend is described as "adaptable," an enemy as "wishy-washy."

So let's agree to use gentle, friendly words when describing Scripture. In parallel texts we will observe "differences" between them. In some cases those differences are crucial to each author's message. Let's grant them the privilege of choosing their words with care. And then let us go and do likewise.

In this connection Ellen White's counsel to a firebrand of a preacher is appropriate: "Every sermon you preach, every article you write, may be all true; but one drop of gall in it will be poison to the hearer or the reader. Because of that drop of poison, one will discard all your good and acceptable words. Another will feed on the poison; for he loves such harsh words; he follows your example, and talks just as you talk. Thus the evil is multiplied" (6T, p. 123).

Discussions touching on the inspiration of Scripture have proven to be as volatile and divisive as any throughout the history of Christianity. So should we just avoid the topic? Let sleeping dogs lie?

Our problem is that sleeping dogs do wake up—and not necessarily on command. We live in a world where many who read Scripture do not see it as the Word of God. Why should we or our children want to be surprised by the comments of someone who is not sympathetic to God's Word?

No, hiding is not the answer. If our position on inspiration needs revision, let us set about revising it. In the words of Ellen White: "We should never allow ourselves to employ arguments that are not wholly sound" (CWE, p. 40).

In Part II, I have attempted to lay out a framework within which the illustrations of Part III will make good sense. I know enough about myself and my church to know that we who believe will not see new evidence unless we are reasonably sure that we can integrate it into our house of faith. The illustrations found in Part III have led me to the suggestions developed in Part II. But there is likely to be a reciprocal relationship between the two parts as we match evidence with theory and attempt to arrive at arguments that are "wholly sound" and meet the needs of Christian experience.

We cannot develop sound arguments unless we deal with the evidence. Every time we pick up God's Word we confront the topic of inspiration and deal with the evidence in one form or another. Since we cannot avoid the topic, let us do all in our power to be careful, fair, and helpful.

If there are surprises in the chapters that follow, let's look for the

reasons why. If you find Part III not fitting together, slip back to the documents in Part I and to the suggestions developed in Part II. In the experience of my students, the documents reproduced in Part I, *Selected Messages,* book 1, pp. 15-23, and the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* have proven to be especially helpful. In them you will find a remarkable blend of realism and reassurance—and a carefully chosen vocabulary to help believers appreciate the blending of the human and the divine in Scripture.

It's too late to change God's Word now. It has already been written. In the end we will be far stronger if we make peace with His Word, admitting that His way is best rather than insisting on our own. In what follows I will not attempt to prove what Scripture should be, but rather to illustrate and describe what Scripture is. I will also suggest various ways of fitting the pieces together in a way that will deepen our appreciation for all He has done to communicate with us.

CHAPTER
NINE
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Illustration 1

Law

Acts 15: Changing Times, Changing Laws

Synopsis: The Jerusalem Council illustrates two important points: (1) the process by which the early church grappled with the demise of old divine commands and the addition of new ones (an illustration of a casebook approach) and (2) the process by which the apostolic church determined that the best path to unity lay along the route of a certain diversity.

Key Texts

Acts 15:28, 29 (food offered to idols): "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well."

Acts 16:3 (circumcision of Timothy): "Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and elders who were at Jerusalem. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily."

1 Corinthians 10:23-29 (food offered to idols): " 'All things are lawful,' but not all things are helpful. 'All things are lawful,' but not all things

build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience. For 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it.' If one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. (But if some one says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice,' then out of consideration for the man who informed you, and for conscience' sake—I mean his conscience, not yours—do not eat it.)"

The Jerusalem Council was occasioned by the tensions arising from rapid internationalization of the fledgling Christian church. Christians from a Gentile background did not see why the Jewish rite of circumcision should be binding on them. God had given it to the children of Abraham. Must believers become Jews before they could become Christians?

As we consider Acts 15 in its larger biblical context, four conclusions emerge, all of which have a bearing on the casebook/codebook approach to law.

1. An Old Testament law was declared no longer applicable to at least part of the church: Circumcision was no longer necessary for Christians of Gentile origin. The four-point summary of the conference's decision appears twice in Acts 15 (verse 20 and verse 29). Circumcision is omitted from both lists of requirements, indicating that the Jewish advocates of a codebook approach had not convinced the council.

What is particularly significant about this decision is that the Old Testament *nowhere* indicates that the rite of circumcision was to come to an end. The church determined, in true casebook fashion, that circumcision would no longer be required for Gentile Christians. Apparently the church addressed an issue of culture by appealing to those levels of law that transcend culture: the one, the two, and the ten.

No *specific* "Thus saith the Lord" *from Scripture* (that is, from the Old Testament) was required in order to lay aside circumcision. Yet those in attendance at the council believed that the Lord had spoken. "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," they wrote in their official letter to the churches (verse 28). And if these "General Conference delegates" were thinking of Isaiah 8:20 (as Adventists certainly would in such circumstances)—"To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"(KJV)—they understood law to refer to the one, the two, and the ten, not to the more specific commands that are conditioned by time and culture.

2. The council added a new law or requirement nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament: Abstention from food sacrificed to idols. The prohibitions against blood and things strangled come from the Old Testament. The Greek word translated "unchastity" had a broader application than suggested by the word "adultery" of the seventh commandment, though if we broaden the spirit of the seventh command, it too becomes as inclusive as the word "unchastity" suggests.

The issue of food offered to idols, however, is never addressed in the Old Testament. This addition of a new law indicates that the church felt free to address current issues raised because of the dominance of the Greco-Roman culture. The original Old Testament laws addressed a Canaanite culture that had been heavily overlaid with fertility elements (see examples cited in Chapter 8). Under Greek and Roman influence, the issue of food offered to idols, especially in conjunction with emperor worship, was of sufficient concern that the council felt the need to address it.

3. Even though the council had concluded that circumcision was no longer required, Acts indicates that Paul, for pragmatic reasons, still proceeded to circumcise Timothy, one of his fellow workers (Acts 16:3). During periods of transition, the church will often have to take a both/and approach to some practices, continuing with the old in some instances while cautiously introducing the new. Timothy's mother was a Jew, his father a Greek. Paul chose to err on the side of conservatism rather than make a case for Timothy's freedom.

4. At least one culturally conditioned requirement of Acts 15, food offered to idols, was already in the process of being set aside, even while the brethren voted on it. In 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 Paul takes the position that food offered to idols is nothing to worry about—unless you happen to eat with someone who is still wrestling with the issue.

Although Acts 15 records nothing of the preliminary discussion that led the council to prohibit food offered to idols, we may surmise that the decision was a compromise. If so, as with most compromises, it was beginning to unravel the moment it was voted. Acts 16:4 indicates that Paul actively supported the decisions of the Jerusalem Council as he traveled from church to church. That observation is most intriguing since it immediately follows the comment that Paul had circumcised Timothy. And the account in Acts says nothing about any reservations Paul may have had about the council's decision on the matter of food offered to

idols. Yet in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, he seems to take quite a different line than that voted by the council.

If some at the council thought they had voted a new codebook, Paul preferred to handle it in casebook fashion. His conclusion to the matter in 1 Corinthians 10 is a classic formulation of a casebook approach based on eternal principles. "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many" (verses 31-33).

Paul could not have expressed his commitment to the one great command more clearly. And his casebook approach to law included careful observation as to how he could best serve both Jews and Greeks. Thus he chose to be more conservative than the council in one instance (circumcision), but more liberal in another (food offered to idols).

As the church grew, that kind of diversity served to enhance its unity.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Acts 15 guide the church today in determining which laws still apply and which do not?

2. How is it possible to justify Paul's position on food offered to idols as described in 1 Corinthians, namely, suggesting that it really was a nonissue, when the council had declared it to be an issue and had taken a stand on it?

3. How does Acts 15 and the related biblical material guide us in knowing when we can safely agree to disagree as a church so that unity is preserved through a certain diversity?

CHAPTER
TEN
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Illustration 2
Hymns and Prayers
Prayers of Hatred, Innocence, and Godforsakenness

Synopsis: The position that God inspires the person, not the words, allows inspired writers to pray "problem" prayers: prayers of hatred, innocence, and godforsakenness. The truths found in these prayers are not so much the sentiments they contain as the openness and trust they reveal toward God.

Key Texts

Ps. 137:7-9 (hatred): "Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, 'Rase it, rase it! Down to its foundations!' O daughter of Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall he be who requites you with what you have done to us! Happy shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!"

Matt. 5:43, 44: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Luke 23:34: "And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' "

1 John 3:14, 15: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

Ps. 17:1-5 (innocence): "Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry!

Give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit! From thee let my vindication come! Let thy eyes see the right! If thou triest my heart, if thou visitest me by night, if thou testest me, thou wilt find no wickedness in me; my mouth does not transgress. With regard to the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have avoided the ways of the violent. My steps have held fast to thy paths, my feet have not slipped."

Luke 18:9-14: "He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: 'Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, "God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get." But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.' "

1 John 1:8-10: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Ps. 22:1-2 (Godforsakenness): "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but thou doest not answer; and by night, but find no rest."

James 1:5-8: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord."

High Christian piety calls us to love our enemies, confess our sins, and live a life of faith in God. Where, then, do we turn when an evil person seeks to destroy us—especially when we really *are* innocent? And in the midst of such brutality, who hasn't felt faithless and godforsaken?

We can turn to the Psalms. These are not prayers from perfect people, but prayers from fellow pilgrims. The Psalms tell us that God has an ear to hear, regardless of our sentiments or emotions. He will even listen if we claim that He has forsaken us. Many of my students want to save that

prayer of godforsakenness for Jesus alone. But long before Jesus ever took the prayer on His lips, a real human being in Old Testament times offered it.

God has published prayers from angry, exasperated, and lonely people so that we can know that hope remains for us. Imagine the tragedy if He had published only perfect prayers from perfect people. Alas, such prayers would not be perfect! We need some rough edges, prayers throbbing with powerful emotions. Otherwise, we might be tempted to think that we must first cleanse ourselves from sin and *then* come to God. That would be nothing but salvation by works. The Psalms tell us to come to Him first, as we are. He is the one who heals.

I long for a heart that loves enemies. I want to take innocence in stride while confessing the perversity of my sin. Godforsakenness? May I put it behind me forever! The Psalms help me take the first steps toward the One who can answer all my prayers.

But does God speak through violent men who claim to be innocent and godforsaken? I believe He does. To live with that conclusion, however, I have to believe two things: (a) "It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired" (1SM, p. 21); and (b) the books of the Bible were written "by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments" (GC, p. vi).

Some of God's messengers are way out in front of us, setting high and lofty goals that we long to reach. But some of His messengers are right beside us, breathing out threats with us. And with us they cry out to a seemingly silent God. I am grateful for such companions. It gives me hope as we press toward the kingdom together.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How can the Psalms encourage us to keep growing toward the high standard rather than resting content in our present condition?

2. Is it ever "right" to hate our enemies? God's enemies?

3. What truths about God do the violent and godforsaken psalmists communicate to us?

4. Given Jesus' strong affirmation of the "guilty" tax collector and His condemnation of the "innocent" Pharisee, how can we recognize—without feelings of guilt—those situations in which we truly are innocent and have been wrongly treated?

CHAPTER
ELEVEN

Illustration 3
Words of the Wise
The Optimist and the Pessimist

Synopsis: The sayings of the wise (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) represent the voice of experience filtered through two quite different temperament types. For Proverbs, the optimist, hard work brings rest, rewards, riches. For Ecclesiastes, the pessimist, hard work is nothing but vanity and makes little difference in the world. In the book of Job, both perspectives are woven into the dramatic tension that constitutes the essence of the book.

Key Texts

Proverbs 2:21, 22 (justice and order): "For the upright will inhabit the land, and men of integrity will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the land, and the treacherous will be rooted out of it."

Ecclesiastes 7:15-17 (injustice and vanity): "In my vain life I have seen everything; there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his evil-doing. Be not righteous overmuch, and do not make yourself overwise; why should you destroy yourself? Be not wicked overmuch, neither be a fool; why should you die before your time?"

Job 9:20-22 (injustice): "Though I am innocent, my own mouth would condemn me; though I am blameless, he would prove me perverse. I am blameless; I regard not myself; I loathe my life. It is all one; therefore I say, he destroys both the blameless and the wicked."

A disinterested onlooker might be inclined to say that Christian preaching sounds like Proverbs, while what actually happens in the world sounds more like Ecclesiastes! In Job, of course, both perspectives are brought together in dramatic tension.

One can make a case for both views. Among our friends and acquaintances, we find both. Some just know that hard work is the solution to all the world's problems. They are always convinced that this will be a fine week and a fine year. If something goes wrong, just find out what it is and fix it. For others, however, nothing in the world makes much sense. And they are forever afraid that the world is falling apart and that we are experiencing its last gasp.

While the book of Job clearly seeks a synthesis between the two views, that is not the case with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Each is almost a pure type, one representing the view of a successful young king; the other that of a disillusioned elder statesman.

The Lord saw fit to remind us of both perspectives. Ecclesiastes helps keep the optimists from running roughshod over the depressed and alienated. Proverbs reminds the depressed and alienated that hard work can and does bring good results. Neither in Proverbs nor in Ecclesiastes is there evidence of "revelation" in the technical sense. In them we find no prophets proclaiming, "The Word of the Lord came to me." But those who believe that Scripture has come as a result of special inspiration, would say that the Spirit inspired a human being to share his insights with God's people.

Turning to Job, we find the tension between the two perspectives lying at the very heart of the book. Job's famous friends adopt a line very much like that of Proverbs. It would be easy to suspect that Job himself would have taken a similar stance had it not been for the mysterious disasters that suddenly plagued his life. Job argues desperately with his friends, his circumstances, and his God.

Ironically, what Job's friends say often sounds very good—even in church. But in the end, the Lord tells them that they have not spoken the truth and that they must ask Job to intercede for them (Job 42:7-9).

By contrast, Job blurts out some seemingly frightful things about God. "Know then that God has put me in the wrong, and closed his net about me. Behold, I cry out, 'Violence!' but I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice" (Job 19:6, 7).

Those are not church words. And to be sure, a chagrined Job repents in the end (Job 42:6). But what does it all mean when God twice declares

to the friends: "You have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (verses 7, 8)?

Human experience blends optimism and pessimism. As we read these books, the Spirit can guide us to make the right application in our own experience and in the experience of those whom we are called to help.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How might a casebook approach to Scripture enable us to apply the observations in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes to real-life circumstances?

2. If the more somber perspective of Ecclesiastes is less likely to be used in Christian preaching and teaching, what is its proper role in the life of a Christian community and in the personal life of the individual Christian?

3. How might the simple optimism of Proverbs be both an asset and a liability in the life of a Christian community?

4. In view of some of the strong words that Job says about God, in what sense did he speak "what is right" about Him?

CHAPTER
TWELVE

Illustration 4
In the Archives
Research

Synopsis: Inspired writers with a message to share do not hesitate to augment revelation with research. Whether from archives, libraries, personal letters, or elsewhere, they make use of the writings of others to help get their point across.

Key Texts

1 Kings 11:41: "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the *book of the acts of Solomon?*"

1 Chronicles 29:29: "Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the *Chronicles of Samuel* the seer, and in the *Chronicles of Nathan* the prophet, and in the *Chronicles of Gad* the seer, with accounts of all his rule and his might and of the circumstances that came upon him and upon Israel, and upon all the kingdoms of the countries."

2 Chronicles 9:29: "Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, from first to last, are they not written in the *history of Nathan* the prophet, and in the *prophecy of Ahijah* the Shilonite, and in the *visions of Iddo* the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat?"

Luke 1:1-4: "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were *delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses* and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having

followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed."

1 Corinthians 1:11, 12: "For it has been reported to me by *Chloe's people* that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' "

Sometimes inspired writers receive visions. Sometimes they speak from their own experience. Sometimes they construct a message using the words and writings of others.

The passages noted above explicitly refer to other sources. Once the principle is established that an inspired writer may indeed use sources, it should not surprise us to find hints of sources even where they are not clearly labeled. Scholars have become very adroit in identifying what they believe to be sources, and they may be right in many instances. But to establish the *principle* of source usage, all we need are the verses noted above.

The anonymous author (or authors) of Kings and Chronicles obviously had access to rich resources: royal archives, prophetic records, and genealogical lists.

Luke tells us that he simply went to work collecting and collating materials so that he could tell the story of Christ the way it should be told. We can almost imagine him working in a library with a stack of notecards as he prayerfully plans and shapes his story of Christ.

Even very informal sources may be useful. Paul indicated that a report from Chloe's people—whether oral or written he does not say—occasioned the writing of his letter to Corinth.

Clearly, not all that we have in Scripture comes as a result of direct and special revelation. Where did that idea come from in the first place? It cannot be established on the basis of Scripture. What is important is that the Spirit oversaw the work. In the words of Ellen White: "He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write" (GC, p. vi). The word "selection" in that quotation may be more significant than we might think at first glance.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. In Scripture should we value that which came by revelation more highly than that which came by research?

2. Is it necessary (or even possible) to distinguish in Scripture that which came by revelation and that which came by research?

3. If Luke says that none of the other Gospels tells the story quite right, what does that mean for our own personal preferences? Is it appropriate to have our own favorite Gospel? What are some of the reasons that might make one Gospel more attractive to us than another?

CHAPTER
THIRTEEN

Illustration 5
In the Study
Secretaries, Scribes, and Assistants

Synopsis: Secretaries and assistants work with the inspired writers in the preparation of their material.

Key Texts

Jeremiah 36:4: "Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and *Baruch wrote* upon a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which he had spoken to him."

Jeremiah 36:17, 18: "Then they asked Baruch, 'Tell us, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?' Baruch answered them, 'He dictated all these words to me, *while I wrote them* with ink on the scroll.' "

Romans 16:22: "I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 16:21: "I, Paul, write this greeting *with my own hand."*

Galatians 6:11: "See with what large letters I am writing to you *with my own hand."*

These passages represent the most obvious references in Scripture to secretaries and assistants who worked with inspired writers. Once the *principle* has been established on the basis of evidence in Scripture, we can surmise that unnamed secretaries may have assisted with many of the biblical books.

God will do what has to be done to get the message out. If that means

an inspired person must hire a secretary, so be it. Something like that happened when Moses kept balking at God's insistent call for him to return to Egypt and deliver Israel. "Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person." exclaimed Moses. The Lord's response, as recorded in Scripture, is fascinating: "Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said. 'Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite? I know that he can speak well: and behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart. And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God' " (Ex. 4:13-16).

Moses towers over Aaron in the Pentateuch. But here is God's promise that He would guarantee the work of both.

When the people asked Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary, who *really* was the author of the scroll, they reveal a typical interest in knowing the precise source of the words. Did they come from the credentialed prophet himself, or did the assistant produce them? That very question may suggest why the prophets did not always tell us much about their secretaries. Perhaps even in biblical days the people were not convinced that it was safe for a prophet to use a secretary.

The three references from Paul's letters suggest that a single inspired writer may use secretaries in a variety of ways. Tertius took the liberty to insert his own name and greeting into the closing lines of Romans. We don't know who assisted Paul with Galatians or Corinthians. Indeed, it is possible that Paul may have written Galatians by himself, his comment in chapter 6, verse 11 being the clue that this is an exception.

As for the secretary who produced 1 Corinthians, one thing is certain: he recorded every word with scrupulous care. Paul's conversation with himself in the first chapter is not only a remarkable commentary on how inspiration works, it also testifies to a careful assistant. After describing the divisive party spirit at Corinth, Paul cuts loose with a bombastic exclamation: "I am thankful that I baptized none of you"—suddenly his memory improves—"except Crispus and Gaius." On with the exclamation: "Lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name!" Then his memory improves still further: "I did baptize also the household of Stephanas," he notes apologetically. We sense his embarrassment as he continues: "Beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any one else." Then once more back to the exclamation and with vigor: "For Christ did

not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 1:14-18).

Both the Holy Spirit and the scribe agreed to include all that backtracking for us. In spite of Paul's embarrassment, this evidence of his humanity somehow draws me to him, and I appreciate him all the more as a passionate follower of his Lord.

Yes, inspired writers find assistants and secretaries helpful. And however much of the work "in the study" they may have done, we can do nothing else at this point but simply believe that the Holy Spirit was there to guide and protect, just as He did with Aaron and Moses.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Does it take any greater faith to believe that the Holy Spirit guided the secretaries than to believe that the Spirit guided the inspired writers themselves?

2. What is the source of the feeling that we would rather have the prophet or apostle write the material fresh and new instead of relying on research?

3. Traditional Jewish and Christian sources reveal a strong interest in identifying the actual authors of the biblical books. Is that kind of information merely interesting, or is it essential to establish the authority of the book?

CHAPTER
FOURTEEN

Illustration 6
At the Publishers
Editing and Compiling

Synopsis: The words of God's messengers are treasured by the community to which they are given, sometimes more so in later years than when the messenger is alive. In order to preserve the memory for posterity, editors—*under the direction of the Spirit*—compiled and published new editions of the messenger's words and works. Sometimes, as in the book of Jeremiah, they placed the messenger's own words within a historical framework, providing a kind of "glue" that gives consistency to the whole.

Key Texts

2 Peter 1:20, 21: **"FIRST OF ALL YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THIS, THAT NO PROPHECY OF SCRIPTURE IS A MATTER OF ONE'S OWN INTERPRETATION, BECAUSE NO PROPHECY EVER CAME BY THE IMPULSE OF MAN, BUT MEN MOVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT FROM GOD."**

Proverbs 1:1: "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel."

Proverbs 10:1: "The proverbs of Solomon."

Proverbs 25:1: "These also are proverbs of Solomon *which the men of Hezekiah* king of Judah copied."

Proverbs 30:1: "The *words of Agur* son of Jakeh of Massa."

Proverbs 31:1: "The *words of Lemuel*, king of Massa, *which his mother taught* him."

Jeremiah 1:1-5: "The *words of Jeremiah*, the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the Lord came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you.' "

Jeremiah 29:1: "These are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon."

Jeremiah 36:32: "Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to *Baruch* the scribe, the son of Neriah, *who wrote on it* at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them."

Jeremiah 51:64-52:1: "*Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.* Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king; and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem."

For some of you, we have reached a particularly crucial—indeed, dangerous—point in our illustrations. I have deliberately put 2 Peter 1:20, 21 at the beginning of our texts for this section, doubly emphasized with uppercase and boldface type.

Why?

Because we need a *double dose* of the Spirit right here or we could lose it all to one of two extremes: (a) our faith could collapse because we have seen too much humanity in Scripture, or (b) we could slam this book shut (or any other like it), refusing to look at any more evidence of humanity in Scripture for fear that we might lose faith.

I have seen both responses. I know they happen. Both are dangerous. If we do our homework carefully and prayerfully, we can avoid both extremes. But if you have to choose one or the other, then please close this book right now—at least temporarily. Read something that will affirm your faith. Catch your breath. Then ask the Lord for patience and for courage to come back and grow, step by step, at a pace you can handle.

If you close the book, you can always open it again. But if you lose your faith, there is no assurance you can find it again. That would be the greater

tragedy. Ellen White's quotation cited earlier is appropriate here: "We should be very cautious not to advance too fast, lest we be obliged to retrace our steps. In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. And if there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people" (3T, p. 21).

If you can work through the evidence, your faith and your experience will be much stronger in the end—and you won't have to be afraid anymore of what you might see in Scripture at an unguarded moment. I know the feeling very well, for my own reading of Scripture was once overshadowed with a quiet dread, a fear that somehow I would see something I was not supposed to see.

And let me remind you that we are not trying to cope with nasty observations about Scripture from some hostile critic. What we are dealing with is the evidence sitting right in front of our eyes on the pages of Scripture.

For myself, I am eternally grateful to the Lord for the teachers and circumstances by which He has led me to my present experience. More than anything else I want to share that experience with you. Being able to read Scripture without fear is a deep joy. But for some, the road leading there can prove treacherous. And that is the road we are now traveling together.

Actually, if you can sort through a piece of seeming nonsense, the reason the road is so dangerous is that it has been so dangerous! Let me explain. Sensing the danger, we pull back and refuse to deal with the evidence at all. Instead of moving ahead, smoothing the way and making the road safe, we have left the boulders in place and not put up guardrails. Thus the way remains dangerous.

And what has our fear meant for the life of the church? The loss of some of our keenest and brightest minds. Those with intense curiosity may not be able to close the book in time. If they are undisciplined, they will move faster and faster—and farther—away from faith. And if, as is sometimes the case with brilliant minds, knowledge seems more important than faith, the possibility of faith may disappear forever.

I well remember a vivid telephone conversation with a woman who had listened to tapes of a weekend seminar I had given on the topic of inspiration. She called long-distance in the middle of the day and talked at length, accusing me of destroying faith. I was mystified until she told what had happened to her.

She was working in the archives at Loma Linda University when she

accidentally stumbled across evidence for sources and editing in one of Ellen White's books. (This all happened before the issue of Ellen White's use of sources had broken into the open in the 1970s.) In any event, she described how her faith in Ellen White had collapsed. But not willing to leave it at that, she told how she had marched right over to the University of California at Riverside and enrolled in some Bible classes. Those classes, of course, were in a secular setting. Her suspicions proved correct, and she lost her faith in Scripture, too. Hence her desperate telephone call. She longed to find faith again, but could not. "The least I can do is attempt to protect others," she said.

I deeply appreciated her concern, but I knew that closing our eyes was not the answer. As a church, we have a responsibility to ourselves and to our children, and especially to those with intense curiosity and bright minds. They offer tremendous potential to the church and world. We *must* inch our way forward on the dangerous road. Traveling together, I know we can safely make the trip. We will need to be brave. We will need to be patient. But let us not give up.

We will open the book again. We will remove boulders and build guardrails, smoothing the path to His Word and His kingdom. But we must also pray for wisdom to close the book in time and to wait, if necessary.

So, please, keep a finger on your pulse. Back away if you feel you must. Read the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* if you want a gentle review of some of the same material. Once you have crossed the bridge, you will look back and wonder why you were so frightened. That complex reaction is not because you are dumb and slow. In fact, it may be because you are especially bright and perceptive. More than anything, however, it is simply a sign that you are human.

Stable change is slow change. God made us that way for our own good. Once sin overwhelmed God's people, why do you suppose it took Him so long to bring them back to high ground? to Calvary? to the Second Advent? In part because we are rebels, to be sure. But also because growth comes slowly.

My passionate outburst will mystify some of you. I trust you will try to understand. Though the evidence from Scripture for editing and compiling is obvious and irrefutable, our failure to deal with it bit by bit in the past places us in jeopardy when we see a rather massive dose of it all at once.

And editing is not something we are accustomed to seeing. Even in

secular writings, editors want to be invisible. Indeed, the mark of a good editor is like the mark of a good operator of a public-address system: if you do the job right, nobody will know you're there!

In any event, given our failure to deal with the evidence in the past, exposure to it now easily gives rise to the *impression* that Scripture is *merely* a human book. That's why a double dose of 2 Peter 1:20, 21 is necessary right here. We must repeat the point again and again, in our own minds and in public to one another: "We accept the testimony from Scripture that the Spirit guided and directed in its preparation. Regardless of the methods used, we believe the Spirit has guided the entire process."

Once we have worked it through, it makes such good sense for the Spirit to encourage devout believers to share again the words of God's messengers. Compilations and new editions coming at the right time can be a real blessing. And in many cases it helps to know when we are dealing with compilations. I well remember the stunned reaction of a new Adventist who had received a copy of Ellen White's *Counsels on Stewardship* during a conference-wide stewardship emphasis program. Not realizing the nature of the compilation, she sat down to read the book through. When we arrived at her home on a pastoral visit, she was almost beside herself. "All this woman thought about," she exclaimed, "was money, money, money!" Failure to realize that the book was a compilation almost proved disastrous.

The evidence for editing and compiling is most obvious in Proverbs and Jeremiah, thus establishing the *principle* that the words of inspired messengers may in fact be handled in such a manner. Once the principle has been established, we need not be alarmed if we find more subtle clues of editing in other biblical books. Editors may have been at work on them as well. Why not?

Now some summary observations about the evidence, with a special focus on Proverbs and Jeremiah.

Proverbs

For Proverbs the passages cited at the beginning of the chapter lead to the following conclusions:

1. Proverbs is a compilation of compilations. That the book contains a series of "titles" indicates that the first title belongs only to the first nine chapters and not to the book as a whole. The second title covers the section beginning with chapter 10.

2. Parts of Proverbs were written by someone other than Solomon.

The most obvious non-Solomonic portions consist of chapters 30 and 31. In fact, the *real* author of chapter 31 appears to be a woman, the mother of King Lemuel.

3. At least one of the compilations was prepared more than 200 years after Solomon's death. The "men of Hezekiah" compiled the section beginning with Proverbs 25:1. As a result of heightened interest in the sayings of the wise during Hezekiah's reign, we have an additional collection of Proverbs that is now part of our Bible.

One additional sidelight is worth mentioning here, even though it involves extrabiblical material, namely, the parallel between Proverbs 22:17-23:11 and a collection of Egyptian proverbs entitled the "Instruction of Amenemope." The parallels are striking. Conservative interpreters have tended to argue that Amenemope borrowed from Proverbs; critical scholars see the relationship the other way around. From the standpoint of inspiration, the relationship could go either way without affecting the authority of the book of Proverbs as we now have it.

A good commentary on Proverbs will give a careful analysis. A brief discussion with illustrative parallels from both sources is found in *Old Testament Survey,* a convenient guide to the Old Testament published by Eardmans (LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, p. 554).

Jeremiah

The text of Jeremiah suggests the following conclusions:

1. An editor, possibly part of the "Jeremiah Estate," prepared the book by incorporating historical material along with Jeremiah's prophetic oracles. In comparison with Proverbs, the book of Jeremiah would appear to be less like a compilation and more like a proper book. The analogy with the Ellen G. White Estate in contemporary Adventism may be instructive, despite the significant gap between Jeremiah's day and our own. In any event, the key features under this heading are as follows:

a. The presence of oracles in the first person along with narrative and descriptive material in the third person. The prologue (Jer. 1:1-4, see above) is the equivalent of a "publisher's preface." Reporting in the third person, the prologue provides the normal "title page" information: (1) Identification of Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, priest of Anathoth in the land of Benjamin; (2) the beginning date of Jeremiah's ministry (from the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign); and (3) the duration and end of Jeremiah's ministry (through the reign of Jehoiakim to the eleventh year of King Zedekiah and until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month).

Not until verse 4 of the first chapter do we hear Jeremiah in the first person: "Now the word of the Lord came to *me* saying . . ." Thereafter, first-person (I/me) oracles from Jeremiah are linked with third-person (he/him) historical narratives. Even the famous story of the burning of the scroll by the king (Jer. 36) is told with a blend of first- and third-person references.

b. Insertion of a letter from Jeremiah prefaced by a third-person narrative introduction (Jer. 29).

c. Addition of a historical postscript clearly marked off from the rest of the book. As noted previously, Jeremiah 51:64 concludes with the words "Thus far are the words of Jeremiah." The book of Jeremiah as we have it, however, continues on with Jeremiah 52, an almost verbatim parallel of 2 Kings 24:18-25:30.

The postscript is highly relevant. It describes the destruction of Jerusalem and the beginning of the Exile, events Jeremiah faithfully predicted, even at the risk of his own life. The final chapter is the author's way of confirming the truth of Jeremiah's message.

Whoever put the finishing touches on Jeremiah intended the last phrase of Jeremiah 51:64 to be informative, not frightening. But I know of at least one instance when colleagues of mine, presenting Jeremiah in a workers' meeting, had to deal with two pastors who were thoroughly shaken by the sudden realization that Jeremiah did not write the last chapter of the book. Conditioned by the assumption that the prophet must receive all his messages by direct revelation from God and must write everything himself, they were frightened by the thought that Jeremiah 52 was not inspired. And if part of Jeremiah was not inspired . . .

Again we meet the domino effect, the crack in the dike, the slippery slope. In this instance a nonbiblical assumption clashed with the evidence in Scripture. What alternatives did they have? Basically three. Let me spell them out with a simple illustration, then we will make the serious application.

A chauvinistic male marries a wife, expecting perfection in all things. One day she burns the beans. The alternatives are three:

One, both the assumption (perfect wife) and the evidence (burned beans) are recognized: "No perfect wife will burn the beans." He tosses her out.

Two, the assumption (perfect wife) is retained; the evidence (burned beans) is denied: "This is a remarkable new flavor for beans. What kind of seasoning did you use?" The man grits his teeth and, with an enormous act

of the will, declares the beans good and swallows them down.

Three, the assumption is revised in light of the evidence: "Yes, the beans are burned (recognition of the evidence). But I love my wife for all she means to me (revision of the assumption of what constitutes a perfect wife). We simply won't worry about the occasional burned beans." Recognizing that our world is not one of absolute perfection, the man and his wife live happily ever after.

Now let us return to our two pastors as they ponder their alternatives relative to Scripture. They face three choices:

One, continue to hold to the assumption (i.e., a book of the Bible comes by revelation and must be written by the named author), *and* recognize the evidence (i.e., part of the book did not come by revelation and was not written by Jeremiah), concluding, therefore, that God has not spoken through Scripture. Scripture as the Word of God dies.

Two, continue to hold to the assumption, but refuse to recognize the evidence in Scripture. Belief is possible with this alternative, but it requires a powerful act of the will, an act of will stronger than the force of the evidence.

Three, revise the assumption in the light of the evidence. Belief is also possible with this alternative, but it requires enough time to overcome the lingering traces of the old assumption. And old assumptions, old beliefs, do not die easily, especially if they are tied to religion.

An Adventist woman in Germany told me how the sense of Sunday sacredness, drilled into her as a child, lingered a full seven years after her baptism as an Adventist. She had given *mental* assent to the Sabbath, based on the evidence in Scripture, but required seven years more before she could really make her body rest on Sabbath and work on Sunday.

In the case of the two pastors, they assumed that inspiration should function in a particular manner. Typically, conservative Christians take the "I like the burned beans" approach and deny the evidence. That is easier to do, however, if you are not staring at the evidence in Scripture itself!

As they faced the text of Jeremiah, the second option was no longer viable. They did not have the willpower to deny the evidence. They either had to toss over their faith or make peace with the evidence. With help, they began to make peace with the evidence.

2. Neither the book nor the oracles of Jeremiah are organized chronologically. It is possible, of course, that either an editor or Jeremiah himself could have been responsible for the present organization of the

book. Whereas some of the oracles are undated, many are explicitly linked with the last four kings of Judah. Thus it is easy to determine that some principle other than chronology provided the basis for the book.

Chapters 21 to 29 provide a good testing ground. All except 23 are dated. The sequence of kings (with alternate names) is as follows, with the chapters distributed as in Jeremiah:

a. Jehoahaz (Shallum): 22 (part)

b. Jehoiakim: 22 (part), 26, 25

c. Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah): 22 (part)

d. Zedekiah (Mattaniah) 21, 24, 27, 28, 29

3. The Septuagint, the early Greek version of the Old Testament, revises the text of Jeremiah.

a. The total text of Jeremiah in the Septuagint is about one eighth shorter than it is in the original Hebrew text. The omissions in the Septuagint are small ones, generally phrases or sentences from throughout the book.

Something similar is evident in the Septuagint of the book of Job, which is one sixth shorter than the Hebrew original. In Job it would appear that the very difficult Hebrew led the Septuagint translators simply to omit troublesome phrases rather than guess at the meaning.

The same rationale does not appear to be the case in Jeremiah. In both books, however, the effect might be something like a *Reader's Digest* condensed book with the story line remaining intact.

b. One large section of Jeremiah, the "oracles against the nations," is relocated in the Septuagint.

In the Hebrew Bible (and thus in our English Bibles), the oracles constitute chapters 46 to 51, the last major section of Jeremiah before the historical postscript. The Septuagint moves this whole section to follow after Jeremiah 25:13, a verse that actually serves quite nicely as a logical introduction for the oracles: "I will bring upon that land all the words which I have uttered against it, everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations." At that point, the Septuagint includes the oracles against the nations.

From a practical point of view, the primary disadvantage is the inconvenience for scholars who wish to compare the Septuagint with either the English or the Hebrew text. And for young scholars who think they know a little Greek, forgetting the rearranged text can be the cause of a real fright as they recognize absolutely nothing familiar in the text!

Summary

If the Lord wishes to use editors and compilers to bring His message to us, that is His decision. And so He has decided. The truth of 2 Peter 1:20, 21 still stands: Scripture has come to us by the Holy Spirit, whether it be through revelation or research, secretary or scribe, editor or compiler—or by large letters written by Paul's own hand. Any way you write it, it is still God's Word.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What is the source of the assumption that all Scripture should come by revelation and that each book should be written by a named author?

2. What steps should the church take to overcome faulty assumptions that hinder our ability to understand and apply Scripture?

CHAPTER
FIFTEEN

Illustration 7
Old Testament Parallel Passages

Samuel-Kings and Chronicles: Same Story, Different Message

Synopsis: Old Testament parallel accounts are useful for illustrating three key points: (1) the differences in minor details that show up in parallel accounts simply because imperfect human beings are part of the transmission process, differences in numbers, names, and places; (2) the major significance of a difference in detail as a marker of present truth, a fresh theological insight not previously recognized by God's people; and (3) the use of deletions, additions, and modifications to shape a particular message about God through an entire book.

Writing to a community threatened with discouragement, the author of Chronicles sought to nurture hope by retelling the story of Israel's history, emphasizing the positive and omitting much of the negative. The basic story is the same as in Samuel-Kings, but the message is different because the Spirit has guided the author to meet a special need at a special time.

Key Texts

David's Census: 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21
"Who Did It?"

2 Samuel 24:1: "Again the anger of *the Lord* was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against

1 Chronicles 21:1: "*Satan* stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel."

them, saying, 'Go, number Israel and Judah.' "

"How Many?"

2 Samuel 24:9: "And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to the king: in *Israel* there were *eight hundred thousand* valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of *Judah* were *five hundred thousand.*"

1 Chronicles 21:5: "And Joab gave the sum of the numbering of the people to David. In all *Israel* there were *one million one hundred thousand* men who drew the sword, and in *Judah four hundred and seventy thousand* who drew the sword."

"Who?"

2 Samuel 24:16: "And the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of *Araunah* the Jebusite."

1 Chronicles 21:15: "And the angel of the Lord was standing by the threshing floor of *Ornan* the Jebusite."

"How Much for What?"

2 Samuel 24:24: "So David bought the *threshing floor* and the *oxen* for *fifty shekels of silver.*"

1 Chronicles 21:25: "So David paid Ornan *six hundred shekels of gold* by weight for the *site.*"

Some biblical stories are sufficiently removed from our day that a simple reading of the text poses an immediate problem for us. In the story of David's census, for example, one of the first questions that comes to *our* mind is What's wrong with taking a census? Isn't that what God commanded Moses to do in the wilderness? (See Num. 1:2.)

The question is ours, not one raised by any of the human actors in the story. Indeed, Joab, David's crusty general, not typically known for his moral insight, somehow recognized that David was on dangerous ground, for he challenged the king. We can surmise that the census had to do with David's pride. Perhaps he was more interested in celebrating his power as king than the greatness of the Lord his God.

But that kind of issue slips to the background, and other weightier issues emerge when we lay the two versions of the one story side by side. The account of David's census serves as an example of the kinds of challenges posed by parallel biblical passages. Since the details highlighted

in the key texts are so striking, we will reverse the normal logic, dealing first with insignificant details, then a significant one, and finally with the larger issue of the overall relationship between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles.

The Differences in Minor Details

Remember the story from our preface about the student who almost went out and shot himself after doing a college Bible assignment? The verses listed under the key texts for this chapter illustrate *some* of what he found when he turned to Scripture.

We can attempt to harmonize the details if we feel we must. A number of Bible students have tried. For example, one student of Scripture understood the differences in the amount of money David paid for the land as relating to different acreages. The larger amount was supposed to be what he paid for the entire mountaintop; the smaller amount what he paid for just the place to sacrifice. (Despite such attempts, I'm not optimistic about the probability of success.) But let me suggest another option: when God gave us parallel accounts with their diversity of detail, one of His purposes may have been to illustrate the kinds of details not worth quarreling over, not worth losing sleep over.

An awareness of how biblical writers used sources (see Illustration 4, Chapter 12, "In the Archives") suggests that the two authors may have had access to different accounts of the same event. Could not God have overruled in the process so that the details would agree? Of course He could have. But He chose not to—at least that is what the evidence in the Bible itself suggests.

And in that connection, a question might help us see the matter in a more practical light. If I were telling this story in the primary division at Sabbath school, would the amount paid, for example, make any difference in the punch line or application of the story? Not in the slightest.

The issue, however, is the one of confidence. Can we trust Scripture? Of course. But faulty assumptions about how inspiration should function lie at the root of the problem, and the problem will not easily be put aside.

We must be realistic, for even if God is telling us that we ought not lose sleep over such details, it seldom helps those who *are* losing sleep simply to tell them that they should *not* be losing sleep. Some will indeed be troubled over such things as the difference between *50 shekels of* **silver** and *600 shekels* of **gold** (if only the metals had been reversed!).

We need patience. When assumptions are deeply rooted, it takes time

to unlearn them and make peace even with the most obvious facts. In my own experience, once I made my own peace with the kinds of differences found in this story (and thus elsewhere in Scripture), I found myself pondering the question Where and how did the inerrancy view of Scripture originate? And how could it develop such tenacious roots in view of the evidence from Scripture itself?

I have concluded that the theory must have come first (apart from careful consideration of the detail in Scripture) on the basis of certain assumptions of how an ultimate authority (God) should and would communicate. Instead of being informed by the text, the theory is imposed on the text. And once such a view receives social support from a community of believers, it is almost impossible for individuals to rise up and say "Look what I found in Scripture" without jeopardizing their own place in that community. A similar phenomenon can be observed in a country ruled by an all-powerful dictator. As anyone in such a country will tell you, the dictator is always right, even when he is wrong.

The Significant Detail: Satan or God?

One detail in this story, at least in my view, makes a great deal of difference: Did God (book of Samuel) or Satan (book of Chronicles) make David number the people? If you wish, you could hazard a guess as to which option Ellen White chose in *Patriarchs and Prophets*. She opts for Satan and 1 Chronicles (p. 747).

That was really the point I was after when I asked my students to compare the two accounts, for here, I believe, is a premier example from Scripture of what Adventists have called "present truth," new truth for which God's people are spiritually and intellectually ready to receive *now* (hence the word *present*) but for which they may not have been prepared earlier.

A touch of Adventist history can help us appreciate the biblical story better. The most vivid application of the phrase comes during the 1888 experience. Addressing the delegates at the General Conference session, Ellen White said: "That which God gives His servants to speak today would not perhaps have been present truth twenty years ago, but it is God's message for this time" (MS 8a, 1888, Olson [1981], p. 282).

Ellen White was responding in part to a telegram from the ailing General Conference president, George I. Butler, who was not able to attend the conference but was sufficiently fearful of change that he sent a telegram to the delegates with the message "Stand by the landmarks."

Ellen White's point was that the church may not have been ready for the message of Jones and Waggoner 20 years earlier. But now the time had come. Their message was present truth.

Returning to the biblical story, the parallel is intriguing. It would not be correct to say that one story is right and the other wrong, even if one account happens to be more helpful or understandable to us than the other. Although Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew Old Testament—and thus the last word, so to speak—there is a sense in which each writer brought present truth to his readers, a message ripe for the times. *Given the differences in historical circumstances, each book presents the right message at the right time.*

An overarching explanation that harmonizes the two accounts theologically is readily available, of course, namely, that Satan operates under God's control and with His permission. But if we hasten too quickly to that harmonization, we could miss the real significance of the difference between the two accounts.

To come to the point, the appearance of Satan in Chronicles was present truth for ancient Israel. For Christians who are thoroughly familiar with Satan, that comes as a surprise. I well remember my own surprise when I discovered the following fact: *Satan, as a clearly identified supernatural figure opposed to God, appears in only three Old Testament contexts: Job 1 and 2; Zechariah 3; and here in 1 Chronicles. All three were either written or canonized toward the end of the Old Testament period.*

Who, then, is responsible for evil in the Old Testament? The answer is startling, almost revolutionary in its impact on our understanding of the Old Testament: God Himself is presented as the author of evil. *Throughout virtually all of the Old Testament, evil is described as coming directly from God, not through Satan.* In short, what seems blasphemous to us is taken for granted as everyday truth in the Old Testament.

Who met Moses on the way to Egypt and "sought to kill him"? The Lord (Ex. 4:24). (See Appendix D for comment on the names for God in the OT.) Who destroyed the firstborn in Egypt? Not Satan. Not even an angel. Again and again in Exodus, in both threat and fulfillment, the stark truth is drilled home: the Lord Himself passed through the land as the deadly slayer (Ex. 4:22, 23; 11:4; 12:12, 13, 23, 27, 29). Who sent the fiery serpents in the wilderness? The Lord (Num. 21:6).

Have you ever wondered why Uncle Arthur's or Ellen White's versions of the Old Testament stories are so much easier to read than the Bible

itself? Part of the reason is that once we learn about present truth, we quite naturally go back and tell those stories in the light of our new knowledge. And that is what Uncle Arthur, Ellen White, and virtually every Christian since New Testament times have done with the Old Testament stories. Now that we know about Satan, we put him in where we know he belongs—or where we think we know he belongs. We find it much easier to see the flaming sword in the hand of Satan rather than in the hand of our "loving heavenly Father" or in the hand of the "kind and gentle Jesus."

But that was not the way ancient Israel heard the story.

Why? We will suggest a scenario. Then we must look more closely at the three passages in which Satan does appear—plus four others that might seem to counter the suggestion that Satan arrived late on the Old Testament scene.

But first the scenario. After the Fall, the knowledge of the true God rapidly disappeared from the earth. Genesis 3 through 11 describe one catastrophe after another: our parents' first sin and the curse on the earth (Gen. 3:1-24); Cain's murder of his brother Abel (Gen. 4:8); Lamech's outrageously vengeful feelings (Gen. 4:23, 24); the Flood (Gen. 6:1-8:19); Ham's insult of his father (Gen. 9:20-27); the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9). By Abraham's day even the patriarch's own family "served other gods" (Joshua 24:2). Child sacrifice was likely viewed as the highest form of worship until God taught Abraham otherwise (Gen. 22). And Abraham took a second wife with no qualms of conscience because, in the words of Ellen White, "polygamy had become so widespread that it had ceased to be regarded as a sin" (PP, p. 145), an observation confirmed by a reading of Genesis.

In that almost godforsaken world, where the satanic experiment with selfishness had reached full-blown proportions, the forces of evil splintered divine authority, parceling out the leftovers to a multitude of deities, both good and evil. Polytheism reigned.

Since the gods often war with each other in a polytheistic system, human beings struggle to pacify the right gods at the right time, especially the evil ones, since they are the ones that can hurt you. Thus magic and incantation become deeply rooted in pagan cultures as means of warding off the evil spirits.

To Abraham, God announced plans to win back His world. But even though Abraham agreed to play a key role, progress was slow. And centuries of slavery in Egypt almost wiped out the gains that God had made.

Then God took charge again. "Pharaoh will not let you go," He told Moses, "unless compelled by a mighty hand." God had His mighty hand ready. "I will harden Pharaoh's heart. I will slay his firstborn." And then, as Israel stood poised to march out of Egypt, God promised Moses that He would deliberately lead the people into an impossible corner. Pharaoh would pursue. And then?

The narrative in Exodus throbs with power: "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord" (Ex. 14:4).

And so it happened. Israel too was impressed. As recorded in Exodus: "Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore. And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did against the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord; and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses" (Ex. 14:30, 31).

Where was Satan in all this? Right there, to be sure—at least that is what a Christian would say—but nowhere in sight as far as Israel was concerned. In short, given Israel's long exposure to paganism in Egypt, it appears that God adopted at least three key measures to protect His people against the temptation to worship Satan as an evil deity:

1. Israel was forbidden to worship any other gods besides the Lord. God's first command was "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3, KJV). He did not deny the existence of other gods. Instead, He simply told Israel to restrict her worship to the Lord.

2. The practice of magic and divination was strictly forbidden in Israel. Deuteronomy 18:9-14 details all the magical practices that were forbidden to Israel. Theologically, the prohibition is significant, for magic and divination were simply means of manipulating gods that could not be trusted. But the Lord was a God you could trust. He did not need to be manipulated. Indeed, He could not be. Israel was forbidden even to try: "For these nations, which you are about to dispossess, give heed to soothsayers and to diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you so to do" (Deut. 18:14).

The prohibitions against other gods and against magic prepared the way for the next step, probably the most impressive one when it comes to our attempts to understand and interpret the Old Testament.

3. The Lord, Israel's God, assumed full responsibility for both good and evil. Perhaps the most vivid statement to this effect is found in the book of Isaiah. Inserting the personal name of Israel's God, *Yahweh*, in

place of the circumlocution *Lord*, makes the passage come alive even more: "I am [*Yahweh*], and there is no other, I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe, I am [*Yahweh*] who do all these things" (Isa. 45:6, 7).

Picture a father entering a wild jungle with his 2-year-old son. He chooses not to tell the boy about all the lions, tigers, and snakes. That could be more of a fright than the lad could stand. Instead, the father simply says: "Hold tight to my hand. I'll take care of you."

It seems to me that this is what God did for Israel when He chose not to tell them about Satan. It was His pastoral concern lest they fall again into the grip of paganism. They must learn first that there is one God, all-powerful, all-seeing, all-knowing. They must learn to trust Him.

In time they could learn about Satan. But that would be present truth for some future date. For Israel coming out of Egypt, the present truth was that Yahweh ruled supreme over all nature and all nations. That was the lesson they had to learn before they could learn any others.

Christians may rightly interpret the hand of Satan as being present in the Old Testament stories. But it is helpful to recognize the difference between our *interpretation* and what the text of Scripture actually says. With that in mind, we turn now to the key Old Testament passages that tell us about Satan.

Satan: The Old Testament Evidence

The basic meaning of the Hebrew word *satan* is "adversary" or "accuser." It could refer to any opponent, including human beings. Hadad the Edomite was a "satan" to Solomon (1 Kings 11:14) as was Rezon the Syrian (1 Kings 11:23, 25). In that sense even a racquetball opponent would be a "satan." Only in time did "satan" (a title) graduate from lowercase status to uppercase and come to refer to a person—*the* Satan. By New Testament times that had clearly happened. Satan is *the* adversary of God and man.

In the Old Testament, however, even in the three contexts in which the word definitely refers to a supernatural opponent of God, it probably still means *a* satan rather than *the* Satan. Dating for the three passages is not clear. First Chronicles 21 is the latest to be both written and canonized. Chronicles is in the Writings (the third section of the Hebrew canon) and, as mentioned earlier, is the last book in the Hebrew Bible. Zechariah 3, though part of the Prophets (the second section of the Hebrew canon) is postexilic and one of the last prophetic books.

That brings us to Job 1 and 2. Since the book itself is not explicit in the matter of authorship, traditional Jewish sources suggest a variety of possibilities for the date and authorship of Job. The name of Moses is dominant, however, and is the one with which Adventists are most familiar (Ed. p. 159; 3SDABC, p. 1140 [EGW]).

Interestingly enough, the book of Job is found in the Writings (the final section of the Hebrew canon), suggesting that it did not become fully authoritative until near the close of the Old Testament period. Yet scholars all agree that the story itself is an ancient one, reflecting an early patriarchal setting.

Satan, of course, appears only in the prologue of Job, and then only in the two heavenly scenes. Nothing in the book itself indicates that Job, his wife, or his friends know anything about Satan. Job complains to and about God, but never mentions Satan. The author and the readers know about Satan. The human actors in the book apparently do not.

Now, if one accepts Mosaic authorship, several possibilities present themselves: (a) Moses wrote the book as it now is, (b) Moses drew on an ancient story and incorporated the prologue to give it the great controversy setting, or (c) Moses recorded the story without the prologue; the great controversy setting was then added by a later inspired writer.

The issue probably cannot be resolved. If the book did come from an early time, however, it may have been "too hot to handle." That would explain why it did not gain canonical status until near the end of the Old Testament period.

Interestingly enough, even in those passages in which Satan does appear, his involvement with evil is still secondary. In Job 2:3, for example, the Lord lauds Job to Satan while at the same time complaining that "you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause." It is still the *Lord* who acts against Job.

At least some elements from the Judeo-Christian tradition have interpreted four additional texts from the Old Testament as applying to Satan. In each instance it is possible to affirm that the interpretation and application are correct while maintaining that the explicit identification in the text is missing. Thus we are free to say that the Old Testament reader would not necessarily make the same application as we would make.

The Serpent in Genesis 3—In Genesis 3 the serpent is identified only as being "more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made" (verse 1). We certainly suspect that he is an opponent of God. But he is not yet labeled as Satan. The serpent figure remains ambiguous. The

fact that Revelation 12:9 is the first clear reference in Jewish or Christian sources to label the serpent as Satan may explain why a bronze serpent could still serve as an instrument of healing in the wilderness (Num. 21:8, 9). The serpent was also an ambiguous symbol for the Egyptians, representing both a good deity and an evil one.

Azazel in Leviticus 16—The meaning of Azazel in Leviticus has been widely debated. He is not identified in the chapter at all, certainly not with the label of Satan. Evangelical Christians resist the Adventist identification of Azazel with Satan because of complications they see in connection with the doctrine of the atonement. The Adventist interpretation, however, is foreshadowed in the intertestamental book of Enoch, where Azazel is leader of the rebel angels. Many modern scholars identify Azazel with demonic forces. (See 1IDB, pp. 325, 326.)

Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12-15—Although the identification of Lucifer ("Day Star") with Satan is thoroughly fixed in Christian tradition, the first known record of that identification is found well into the Christian era in the writings of the church father Tertullian (died 225). In Isaiah 14:4 Lucifer is addressed simply as "king of Babylon."

Anointed Cherub in Ezekiel 28:11-19—The first identification of the cherub with Satan apparently came in the fourth century of the Christian era. That tradition is based on the Hebrew text and is followed by the KJV. The RSV follows the Greek Septuagint and a textual tradition suggesting that the cherub cast out the first man. In Ezekiel itself the cherub is addressed simply as the "king of Tyre" (verse 11).

Speaking personally, I have no difficulty whatsoever in affirming the Adventist interpretation of these passages. I also believe that Satan was everywhere present throughout the Old Testament. But that conviction was apparently not shared by the Old Testament people themselves. For them it was not yet present truth.

Did Satan Do It?

To claim that Satan is everywhere present in the Old Testament, however, still does not resolve the problem of how God's omnipotence relates to demonic forces. While most Western Christians would be much more comfortable in saying that God *allowed* evil rather than *caused* it, both interpretations are still possible.

Who causes fatal accidents? A good Old Testament answer would be: God. Our more modern response is likely to be that God *allows* Satan to cause them. Yet even in our day, some believers want to push everything

off on Satan, whereas others prefer to push everything off on God.

The author of Jubilees, a Jewish intertestamental book, was sufficiently uncomfortable with the early stories of Genesis and Exodus that he rewrote the entire history of that period, attributing every act of violence to a demonic figure, including the command to sacrifice Isaac and the killing of the firstborn in Egypt. Obviously that is going to the other extreme from that represented by the Old Testament writers.

The difference between the Old Testament perspective and our own may be seen by comparing the vivid Old Testament description of the serpent plague and the interpretation of that passage by Ellen White.

In Scripture, Numbers 21:6 simply reads: "Then the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died."

Ellen White's interpretation reveals a definite shift from God as *causative* agent to God as *permissive* agent: "Because they had been shielded by divine power, they had not realized the countless dangers by which they were continually surrounded. In their ingratitude and unbelief they had anticipated death, and now the Lord permitted death to come upon them. The poisonous serpents that infested the wilderness were called fiery serpents, on account of the terrible effects produced by their sting, it causing violent inflammation and speedy death. As the protecting hand of God was removed from Israel, great numbers of the people were attacked by these venomous creatures" (PP, p. 429).

That more gentle picture of God reflects a more gentle era, or at least the interest of Christians in viewing God more as kindly father than as violent warrior. The question remains open as to whether and to what extent the role of God as *causative* agent might still be the more effective way of describing His activities under some circumstances.

But even if God as warrior still has a role to play, the account of David's census in 2 Samuel 24 remains perplexing. We are not attracted to a picture of a God who incites people to do wrong acts and then punishes both them and innocent people for it.

Most of us would side with Ellen White in choosing 1 Chronicles 21 and calling it present truth. But the theology of 2 Samuel 24 is still consistent with the great thrust of the Old Testament. There we see God, in all His overwhelming omnipotence, leading His people step by step to a clearer knowledge of the truth.

Samuel-Kings and Chronicles Compared

The story of David's census alone cannot begin to reveal the significant differences that exist between Samuel-Kings and Chronicles. And those differences are not at all sinister. The author of Chronicles was not just telling stories, but shaping a sermon to touch the lives of his people.

Chronicles was most likely written some 150 years after Samuel-Kings (treated here as one continuous work), possibly around the year 400 B.C. It is the very last book of the Hebrew Bible.

The author of Chronicles obviously had the text of Samuel-Kings in front of him, but other sources as well. Comparing the two books helps us understand what was important to each author. This is particularly interesting when we deal with Chronicles, since it is clear that his is a revision of Samuel-Kings.

The title given Chronicles in both the early Greek and Latin Bibles, *Paraleipomena*, simply means "omitted things" and does not capture the significance of the Chronicler's purpose. He was not just adding stories left out of Samuel-Kings. He was adding, deleting, and reshaping with a definite purpose in mind, just as surely as a pastor molds and shapes a story to teach a particular lesson.

A parallel synopsis of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles, such as James D. Newsome's *A Synoptic Harmony of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles,* is an excellent tool for expanding our horizons on those books. I will highlight only some key aspects here and hope that you will be tempted to carry your own study further.

The message of the Chronicler must be seen against the backdrop of what was happening among God's people. Many years had elapsed since they had returned from the Babylonian exile, and still God had not restored their fortunes. Discouragement threatened to overwhelm God's people. Was there any hope?

Yes, said the Chronicler. And his message came as a breath of fresh air. We know our fathers sinned, he said. But God has done great things for us in the past. He will do great things for us in the future if we will trust Him. That buoyant optimism is reflected in the stories the Chronicler tells and the emphases he gives within the stories. In broad outline, and in comparison with Samuel-Kings, the following major features characterize the Chronicler's work.

Emphasis on the Glory Years of David and Solomon—The Chronicler ignores the sordid details and the long struggle with the house of Saul that finally ended with David's becoming king over all Israel. In Chronicles,

David is the great king, and God has blessed him. If we want to read about the Bathsheba affair, Absalom's revolt, or Adonijah's rebellion, we will not find a word in Chronicles. Its author leaves such somber matters to Samuel-Kings.

Emphasis on the Temple and Its Services—The postexilic community had a Temple, but it was a scrawny half-cousin of the one built by Solomon. So the Chronicler reminds the community of all the past glories, not by way of rebuke, but as a means of sparking enthusiasm for future possibilities. In comparison with Samuel-Kings, Chronicles greatly expands on the Temple stories that involved David and Solomon, telling about David's extensive preparations for the new Temple and expounding with relish on the Temple dedication under Solomon.

The Chronicler adds the exciting story of Hezekiah's great Passover (2 Chron. 30)—Samuel-Kings doesn't mention it at all—and puts a much more positive face on the confrontation with Sennacherib. And when he comes to Josiah, he again significantly expands the account of Josiah's reform and Passover (2 Chron. 35).

An Almost Exclusive Focus on the Southern Kingdom of Judah—Even though the Chronicler wrote many years after both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah had come to an end, the way he told the story of the two kingdoms lets us know what he thought was important. In short, he almost totally ignored the northern kingdom. God was with Judah and the house of David.

Samuel-Kings provides us with a faithful, albeit painful, rendering of the decline of both kingdoms. Both are constantly cross-referenced until the Assyrians destroy Samaria and take its inhabitants captive in 722 B.C. Chronicles ignores all the cross-referencing, rarely mentioning the northern kingdom at all. Even the extensive ministries of Elijah and Elisha find no mention in Chronicles because they served up north in Israel. And as each book concludes, Samuel-Kings ends on a somber note of judgment, Chronicles on a hopeful note of restoration.

To sum up, Samuel-Kings is a much harsher, judgmental story, detailing all the reasons why God's people failed. It is not a very pretty history. Its author(s) intended to provide an emphatic exclamation point to the Exile itself, making sure that the people understood why the kingdom had fallen: they and their kings had failed again and again. They had forsaken the Lord.

Many decades later, the Chronicler found a people still suffering under that message of judgment, to the point where they had almost lost hope.

So he returned to the same history and brought a touch of optimism to weary hearts. "Yes, we and our fathers sinned," he said. "But our God is good. He will forgive and restore."

I hope I have whetted your appetite. But don't take my word for it. Buy a parallel synopsis of Samuel-Kings and Chronicles. Or better yet, make your own. You will be amazed at what you see.

But please don't do it if you are frightened of finding too many differences. The story is too beautiful to be ruined by fear. So wait until you can do it with enthusiasm. Then you will discover that God impresses His writers to speak to our needs, to tell us of sin when we need a message of judgment, and to tell us of hope when our hearts are weary. The Old Testament stories are much more than simply stories. They are powerful sermons driven by the conviction that God is Master of the universe and Lord of our lives.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What kinds of differences could you tolerate in two letters from two members of the family reporting on the same events while on vacation? What about reporting on an accident or tragedy? At what point would minor differences call into question whether or not a particular event had taken place? Would that depend on whether or not we trust the people who are telling us?

2. Do you find times in your own life when you sense the need for a more overwhelming presence of God's power, a sense that He is in charge—as suggested, perhaps, by the first verse in Samuel's version of David's census? And then are there times when you might feel that things just happen by chance, or through demonic power, while God stands back in the distance—as suggested, perhaps, by the first verse in the Chronicles account of David's census?

3. Can you recall instances in the life of your local church when the pastor felt the need to preach a message of judgment (Samuel-Kings) and other instances when he sounded a note of hope in the midst of otherwise rather sobering disappointments (Chronicles)?

CHAPTER
SIXTEEN

Illustration 8
New Testament Parallel Passages
One Story, Three Lessons

Synopsis: The Gospel writers did not simply tell stories just for the sake of telling stories, but to touch the lives of listeners in a saving way. Some of the differences between the Gospels result simply from the fact that human beings are involved in the process of handing on the tradition. But some differences are essential to the message the inspired writer wished to share.

Key Texts

Crowing of the Cock and the Denials of Peter

Matthew 26:34: "Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.' " (See also Luke 22:34; John 13:38.)

Mark 14:30: "And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.' "

The Inscription on the Cross

Matthew 27:37: "And over his

Mark 15:26: "And the in-

Luke 23:38: "There was

John 19:19: "Pilate also

head they put the charge against him, which read, 'This is Jesus the King of the Jews.' "

scription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.' "

also an inscription over him, 'This is the King of the Jews.'"

wrote a title and put it on the cross; it read, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.' "

The Healing of the Demon-possessed Boy

Luke 9:37-43: "On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. And behold, a man from the crowd cried, 'Teacher, I beg you to look upon my son, for he is my only child; and behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him till he foams, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not.' Jesus answered, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here.' While he was coming, the demon tore him and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And all were astonished at the majesty of God."

Matthew 17:14-21: "And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and kneeling before him said, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; for often he falls into the fire, and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, and they could not heal him.' And Jesus answered, 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me.' And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said to them, 'Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.' "

Mark 9:14-29: "And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them. 'What are you discussing with them?' And one of the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and wherever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.' And he answered them, 'O

faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.' And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has he had this?' And he said, 'From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.' And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes.' Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!' And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again.' And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' And he said to them, 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.' "

A Bible teacher from an Adventist academy once described for me an unsettling experience from his academy classroom. Wanting to introduce the Gospel parallels to his students, he selected the inscriptions on the cross as a good starting point. (See opening key texts.)

"The reaction was almost violent," he said.

One student shouted out, "God could have made those inscriptions the same if He had wanted to."

Said another, "Why did you even show us those? We didn't want to see them."

We talked at length about the difficulties of seeing the Bible as it is instead of the way we think it should be. And we pondered ways of sharing our insights more effectively with the church.

I will not attempt to provide many technical details on the Gospel parallels here. By way of background, it is helpful to know that Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the Synoptic Gospels. *Synoptic*, meaning "with a common view," refers to the fact that the first three Gospels parallel each other in numerous ways. The Gospel of John goes its own way, though it does occasionally provide parallels with the others.

Most scholars agree that Jesus' sayings and the stories about His life circulated in oral form for a number of years after His departure. Mark is generally believed to be the first written Gospel. Tradition suggests that it

both in Matthew and Luke, the order is determined by the author's purpose: "The temptations in Matthew climax with the question as to who was going to rule the world. The issue is kingship! Luke, as we shall see, is concerned with release from Satan's power, so he concludes the temptations with Satan's leaving Jesus standing on the pinnacle of the Temple" (Rice, p. 36).

For a long time I have suspected that if the church could see more of the practical reasons the Gospel writers shaped the message in the way they did, we could begin to relieve the constant need for harmonization.

On several occasions I have tried an experiment that works quite well when done orally. It involves the three synoptic versions of the healing of the demon-possessed boy, read in sequence from the shortest account, Luke 9:37-43, to Matthew 17:14-21, and finally to Mark 9:14-29, the longest. From a technical perspective, one would likely analyze how Matthew and Luke adapted Mark's version. But since the story is so familiar to us, I like to read the shortest version first and ask the audience to tell me what Luke leaves out. Then we hear Matthew, listening for major changes. Finally, we do the same with Mark.

You can try the same thing yourself. Go back to the key texts and read Luke, Matthew, and Mark in that order. Note the additions and omissions. Then ask yourself how they affect the thrust of the story in each instance.

You will discover that Luke records neither the father's cry "I believe; help my unbelief!" nor Jesus' rebuke of the disciples.

Matthew likewise does not mention the father's cry, but does include a firm rebuke of the disciples.

Only in Mark does the father's desperate cry appear. And the rebuke of the disciples is much more gentle than it is in Matthew.

Now, if we ask what each writer was trying to bring out in the story, three different emphases emerge:

Luke concludes with a word of praise for the majesty of God. For him, the act was simply a marvelous testimony to God's power. And that is what he says. Briefly. To the point.

Matthew concludes with a sharp rebuke to the disciples, and uses one of his favorite words (a single word in the Greek): "little-faith." The absence of the conversation with the father leaves Jesus' reprimand standing out sharply as the last word. The story is simply a rebuke of the disciples' lack of faith.

Mark, by including the conversation with the father and softening the rebuke to the disciples, leaves Jesus' conversation with the father and the

reflects Peter's perspective. Again the scholarly consensus is that Matthew and Luke used Mark as one of their sources, along with a collection of orally transmitted "sayings" (referred to as "Q" for short, from the first letter of the German word *Quelle*, meaning "source"). Both Matthew and Luke added unique material of their own. The relationship of the Gospels to each other and to what "really" happened has been and continues to be a lively debate.

The tendency among conservative believers is to resolve the tensions between different accounts by the method of addition. The inscription on the cross, for example, simply becomes a collection of all the phrases put together so that nothing is left out. The result is an inscription that is found in *none* of the Gospels!

A striking example of this method of addition is found in pages 174-176 of Harold Lindsell's book, *Battle for the Bible* (1976), in which he seeks to harmonize the various Gospel accounts of Peter's denial of Christ. Only Mark records two crowings of the cock before the three denials. The other three Gospels consistently speak of one crowing. Each Gospel is internally consistent between Jesus' prediction of the denial and the actual fulfillment.

Lindsell, former editor of *Christianity Today*, takes the challenge seriously and dedicates almost three full pages of his book to giving the details of a harmonization worked out by a friend. The solution calls for three crowings of the cock and six denials!

When I tell that story to Adventist audiences, I am encouraged by the fact that it almost always generates a good-natured chuckle. We may be conservative, but not *that* conservative! And I don't mean to make light of Lindsell's interest in harmonization. He is deadly serious. For him the differences are no chuckling matter. But I still find it remarkable that he could propose a solution to the problem that is not found in any of our present Gospels.

In some cases the method of addition does not help. With reference to Jesus' temptations, for example, Matthew 4 and Luke 4 follow a different order for the last two temptations. Because of the influence of *The Desire of Ages*, most Adventists would likely follow Matthew and think of the Temple test as the second temptation and the call for Jesus to worship Satan as the third. But Luke reverses the last two. Who is right, Matthew or Luke?

Actually, that is the wrong question. George Rice, in his helpful little book on the Gospel of Luke, *Luke, a Plagiarist?* suggests that

father's cry "I believe; help my unbelief!" standing out crisp and clear as the pinnacle of attention. Mark wants his story to be a testimony to the beauty of the father's embryonic faith, not a rebuke to the disciples' lack of faith. He tells the story accordingly.

Now, if I were to ask you to reproduce that event on video, could you tell me *exactly* what happened? Of course not. But two essentials appear in all three stories: Jesus' arrival after the disciples' failure, and the ultimate healing of the boy. For the rest, each writer goes his own way. And given that set of circumstances, we can become very frustrated if we try to press for absolute precision to the question What *really* happened?

From my own experience, however, I believe we can emphasize the positive contribution of each Gospel writer precisely at those points where they shape the story of Jesus' words and deeds to meet the spiritual needs of real people. Thus we could see the "differences" with joy instead of fear. By God's grace, perfect love could cast out all fear, and we could revel in the beauties of His Word.

I would like to conclude with a personal experience that gives me great hope for the possibility of being more open with the Gospels and with the Bible as a whole. It is the counterbalance to that experience with the academy students who were angered when they saw the differences in the Gospel stories.

Toward the end of our teacher-exchange year at our Adventist school in (West) Germany, Marienhoehe Seminary, I finally gathered up enough courage to go out and preach in German at one of our outlying Adventist churches. I decided to try a sermon using the three stories of the healing of the demon-possessed boy. I had been encouraged with the response on a couple occasions in America. Could it work in Germany, too? I'd see.

My wife and I found our way to the tiny little upstairs room in which the believers met for Sabbath school and church. It was a comforting island of piety in an otherwise secular world. The fervor and intensity of the believers' involvement in the morning services was a tonic to my soul.

During the sermon, eye contact between speaker and listener was marvelous (indeed, unavoidable)—the people were right under my chin in that tiny room. With vigor and enthusiasm I led the group through the three accounts: Luke's praise of God's healing power, Matthew's rebuke of the disciples' "little-faith," and Mark's emphasis on the father's growing faith. I felt good about the feedback I was getting through their eyes and their body language.

The head elder, a literature evangelist, invited us home to dinner. He

had actually received full ministerial training at our seminary there in Germany, but had elected to enter the literature ministry instead of becoming a full-time pastor. He and his family received us cordially.

As we talked together in their living room, waiting for dinner, my curiosity got the better of me, and I led the conversation around to the morning sermon. I simply asked him—without telling him why I asked—how he felt the people had responded to the sermon, probably a rather bold and brazen question on my part.

He responded positively. But since mere politeness could distort the results, I watched closely for any clues of uneasiness. Not observing anything obvious, I proceeded to tell him why I had preached that particular sermon, explaining what I had hoped to accomplish, both spiritually and educationally. As part of my explanation, I mentioned the strong negative reaction of the American academy students to the differences in the inscriptions on the cross.

His eyes widened. "You mean they are all different?" he queried. I was startled. Here was a man with ministerial training who apparently had not really been introduced to the synoptic problem.

He reached for his Bible, and we had a "Bible study" right there before dinner. A godly man with a stable Christian experience, he was able to look at the evidence and keep smiling. "Amazing," he said. "I'd never seen that before." Just then the call came for dinner.

After the blessing, chatter and conversation resumed around the table. Inevitably, our discussions about the Synoptic Gospels continued. It wasn't long before the rest of the family heard about the results of our Bible study. During the course of the meal, our brother began to relate an experience that had happened to the family. "Two weeks ago," he began, only to be interrupted with a gentle word from his wife. "It was three weeks ago, darling," she said.

Looking my direction with a sheepish grin, he just couldn't resist: "That's a synoptic problem, isn't it?" he said. I could scarcely believe the merriment that broke out instantly all around the table.

When things had settled down, I reflected out loud on what had happened. No one had gotten angry. No one doubted that a real event had taken place—whether two weeks ago or three probably didn't make a great deal of difference in this instance. Wouldn't it be marvelous if our reading of Scripture could be that open and that cordial? I had no difficulty finding agreement.

I have told that story often and reflected on it a great deal. I have

discovered that I end up arguing out of both sides of my mouth. On the one hand, I want to say that some of the differences in Scripture are simply incidental to the involvement of imperfect human beings. On the other hand, I want to argue that some of the differences are absolutely crucial to the author's purpose and message.

After long ponderings, I am not about to repent on either account. Both elements are true. But because the fear is gone, it is relatively easy to make the transition from "incidental difference" to "significant difference." In other words, a difference that I may have noticed many times and simply dismissed as peripheral, may suddenly appear in an exciting new light. I have experienced that phenomenon again and again in my study of Scripture. But I do not believe it could happen that way if I were constantly fearful of what I might find when I turned the page.

But, you ask, if Bible study is that much fun, where do the "tears and struggles" fit in? The tears and struggles come when we take the next step and link the results of our Bible study with the people and events of our everyday life. In the lively dialogue with the Lord, so essential to the proper functioning of a casebook approach, I have to ask the question What do my students, my family, my colleagues, need to hear today: Luke's praise of God's power? Matthew's rebuke of our "little-faith"? or Mark's encouraging story of the father's growing faith?

The people I meet are so complex, so weighted down with myriads of burdens, that I cannot answer those questions quickly or easily. That's where I find my tears and struggles.

But Bible study is my meat and drink. It is my source of strength. I am deeply grateful that the Lord has banished the haunting fear of some deadly "error" in Scripture. The energy formerly drained away by that fear can now be used to bring God's healing words into the lives of people who are experiencing their own tears and struggles, and who long for a word from the Lord.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Can you think of good reasons why God did not harmonize the accounts in Scripture for us? If He didn't do it, does He expect us to?

2. Is it possible that some believers shrug too easily at the differences in Scripture while others work too hard at harmonizing? What personality strengths and weaknesses does each approach bring to the church?

3. How far can we push the parallels between ordinary sermon preparation and storytelling and the shaping of the biblical books? Is

the children's story on Sabbath morning—expanded, contracted, adapted, to meet particular needs—a helpful model for understanding Scripture?

CHAPTER
SEVENTEEN

Illustration 9
Visions
Documentaries or Animations?

Synopsis: Visions from the Lord are less like documentaries of actual events and places and more like animations, adapted to the messenger's ability to understand.

Key Texts

1 Kings 22:19-23: "And Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him on his right hand and on his left; and the Lord said, "Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said one thing, and another said another. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, "I will entice him." And the Lord said to him, "By what means?" And he said, "I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." And he said, "You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go forth and do so." Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the Lord has spoken evil concerning you.' "

Revelation 1:12-16: "Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound

of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength."

Revelation 20:11-15: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who sat upon it; from his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and if any one's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

If you want to try your hand at a really mean assignment, read the key texts and then describe how you tell the difference between what is symbol and what is reality.

Let me assure you that there is no right answer. My guess is that no two people would draw the line in precisely the same place. Indeed, when I give that assignment to college students, they often come back frustrated because they don't know where to draw the line for themselves, much less for anyone else. And that is precisely what I want them to learn.

So what does the church do with visions? How do we know what we can count on, know what is solid and won't move?

The first step is to try to determine *the point* of the vision. With reference to Micaiah's vision, for example, I find my classes divided evenly between two opinions on the "reality" question.

On the one hand are those who have no difficulty in saying, "Yes, that's exactly what happened in heaven. No problem."

On the other hand are those who say, "Nothing like that could happen in heaven. It has to be symbolic."

But both sides have no difficulty in agreeing that *the point* of the vision is that Ahab has allowed himself to be misled by his own prophets and will fall at Ramoth-gilead.

The heavenly court depicted in 1 Kings 22 is vintage Old Testament cosmology and a fascinating topic to pursue. But we cannot do that here. In passing, however, we can refer to the prologue of the book of Job, where a similar setting appears, though not the same procedure.

Only occasionally have I had a student who wishes to take the vision in

Revelation 1 as a documentary of reality. But no one has any difficulty in seeing that vision as an impressive display of divine glory, a prelude to further revelations.

Revelation 20 is particularly intriguing because *the point* is quite clear: the end of all evil and wickedness. But when we begin ticking off the list of victims burning in the lake of fire, the concrete reality begins to shade toward symbolism. From Revelation 20:10 we learn of three victims: the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. Verse 14 adds Death and Hades. Finally, anyone whose name is not found in the book of life also ends up in the lake of fire.

What do you suppose John *really* saw in vision when Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire? A skull and crossbones? A skeleton? Whatever it was, it symbolized the end of death and the grave. In real life, fire could hardly do the job.

Commenting on Revelation 20:10, *The SDA Bible Commentary* observes: "It should be noted that the beast and the false prophet are not literal but symbolic creatures" (7SDABC, p. 882). Traditional Adventist interpretation sees the beast as Roman Catholicism and the false prophet as apostate Protestantism, both human religious *systems*. Fire would be a curious weapon against such. Yet *the point* is assured: their demise.

That leaves us with the devil and people as literal victims of the lake of fire—or are they? Ordinary people quickly slip into unconsciousness in fire. And if we believe our own arguments against the doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul, God will *not* perform a miracle in order to keep the wicked alive. They will be gone quickly.

In this very connection, it is appropriate to mention an intriguing passage in Ellen White's comments on the second death in *Early Writings*: "I saw that some were quickly destroyed, while others suffered longer. They were punished according to the deeds done in the body. Some were many days consuming, and just as long as there was a portion of them unconsumed, all the sense of suffering remained. Said the angel, 'The worm of life shall not die; their fire shall not be quenched as long as there is the least particle for it to prey upon' " (EW, pp. 294, 295).

When presenting the same topic in the book *The Great Controversy*, Ellen White wrote, with reference to Satan: "His punishment is to be far greater than that of those whom he has deceived. After all have perished who fell by his deceptions, he is still to live and suffer on" (GC, p. 673).

If we recognize that visions often provide graphic presentations of abstract truths, then we can look for the point of the vision, rather than

being troubled by the question: Will it really happen this way? In this instance, the point clearly is "proportional rewards" ("punishment according to the deeds done in the body"). And while we may be uncomfortable with the imagery of the wicked suffering "many days," I still have not come up with a really good alternative for illustrating *in vision* the biblical principle of "proportional rewards."

Fire is not the appropriate means for destroying the beast, the false prophet, or Satan—unless one happens to be in vision. After all, how hot does the fire have to be to roast the life out of Satan, a supernatural being? But regardless of whether or not one wants to think of Satan actually burning in real fire for many days, the point of Ellen White's vision in *Early Writings* is pointed and clear: punishment is in proportion to one's guilt.

And with reference to *the point* of Revelation 20, I feel that we are better off arguing that the vision tells us that evil will be totally destroyed rather than attempting to construct some way for taking every detail literally.

The next two chapters, Revelation 21 and 22, take us to the new heaven and the new earth. There, too, our human limitations mean that we are not always sure how to imagine a perfect world. But the vision gives us a good start.

Recognizing the graphic nature of visions enables us to assimilate their "illustrative" value without incorporating their content directly into formal doctrinal positions. Thus we can allow the angel described in *Early Writings* (p. 294) a certain freedom in citing Scripture without forcing that particular usage on the original meaning of the test. (See, for example, the interpretation of the "worm" and related matters in 4SDABC on Isaiah 66:24 and in 5SDABC on Mark 9:48.)

The Concrete and the Abstract

Our dilemma when dealing with visions is that human beings vary greatly in their ability and inclination to shift between concrete and abstract thinking. From my own experience, I have discovered that conservative Christians tend to be more concrete in their way of thinking. That clearly describes the bulk of Adventists: miracles and heaven are real; Jesus was indeed God in the flesh; the Resurrection and Second Advent are literal events.

By contrast, I have noticed that so-called liberal Christians tend to be more abstract in their thinking. They are less inclined to put full stock in

literal miracles or heaven. A literal Incarnation, Resurrection, and Second Advent are also often problematic.

Culture and environment also exert an influence here. I found a real difference, for example, among our German believers when it came to their way of thinking about heaven and the future life. I watched as otherwise very conservative German Adventists became uncomfortable listening to Americans wax enthusiastic about birds, flowers, and well-decked tables in heaven. In America no holds are barred when we talk about the physical pleasures of the future life: boating, sailing, flying, reveling in the tall grass—all that is fair game in an American Adventist heaven.

Understandably, then, given the inclination of German students, when we came to the doctrine of the sanctuary, they grew uncomfortable if I made the heavenly sanctuary too literal. I well remember my initial irritation and their uneasiness as we tried to come to a meeting of the minds in a seminar setting. I had given the class an article on the sanctuary by an American Adventist scholar. Early on in the article he made an appropriate disclaimer about our very limited knowledge of heavenly matters. But then, in good American style, he used the symbols quite naturally and freely, without constantly reminding us that they are just symbols.

That did not go down well with my German students. Almost after every sentence they needed reassurance that these were just symbols. I agreed with them in principle, of course, and we moved on. But the constant pushing in the direction of the abstract and away from the concrete was having its impact on me. And I didn't realize it until I was chattering away at home with my wife one day and made some casual remark about heavenly matters. She stopped me and questioned what I had just said. Suddenly I realized that for no other reason than the constant pressure of the environment, I was making concessions I probably didn't need to make—indeed, should not make.

Some months later, back in America, I took a survey of a standard Adventist audience (if there is such) and asked them how they viewed the investigative judgment. I asked: "On a scale of 1 (concrete) to 10 (abstract), how do you picture the events in your own mind?"

I expected to find a much stronger response at the strictly concrete end of the spectrum. As a matter of fact, 46 percent of the crowd did mark 1: the events are concrete. But 54 percent marked something other than 1, though most were very close to 1, with a 2 or a 3. Still, a narrow majority

of that crowd was willing to put at least some qualification on our ability to see things as they actually are.

Actually, none of us can get very far with our thought processes without using pictures, and rather concrete ones at that. What do love or hate or kindness or anger mean unless we can put arms, legs, and a face with them?

When it comes to the heavenly realm, I like to ask my students to describe for me God's method of keeping records. It is great fun watching thoughtful faces break into amused smiles as the truth dawns and everyone comes to virtually the same conclusion: quill pens and scrolls—possibly books instead of scrolls, but quill pens for sure.

Now, imagine an angel rushing into the heavenly archives with an urgent message: "Quick! We must do something to update our system. Down there on earth they are already using microfiche and computers."

I can't really imagine something like that happening. But then I can't really imagine changing my mental picture from quill pen to computers, either. Gabriel and Company with computers just doesn't ring true. So I am prepared to see quill pens when I think of records in heaven, while telling myself that the reality is something quite different. What is that reality? I don't know. But when God told us about books and records, that was language that human beings could understand. Whether quill pens, microfiche, computers, or the system *really* in use up there, the practical point of the vision is embarrassingly clear, isn't it?

At this point, I wonder if God ever gives a true documentary. More and more I am inclined to think that all divinely inspired visions are animations, adaptations to limited human capabilities. God will do what He has to do to make us understand what is important. But I suspect we are in for some real surprises when we take our first tour of the heavenly realm.

For me, the concrete elements of my conservative Adventist heritage are very important. Everything I know in this life is linked with something tangible: my wife, my children, my colleagues, my church, my world. God created a material world and declared it good. It has been distorted by sin, to be sure, but He has promised to make it new again. That promise is very precious to me. Why do you suppose "the blessed hope" has such deep roots in our Adventist experience if it doesn't point us to a real God who cares for real people and who will take us to a real place?

I tell my students that I want them to keep the pictures—concrete or abstract—that make belief possible for them. C. S. Lewis once said that he

didn't mind if someone thought God had a beard, for no one ever went to hell for believing that.

We can be anywhere along the concrete-abstract scale as long we don't try to impose our pictures on others. And I suppose that is where the concrete thinkers are most likely to err. Our images are so important to us that we may react more vigorously than we should if we think someone is trying to snatch them away from us.

I well remember the warm note of appreciation on an evaluation form after teaching a class on the doctrine of the sanctuary. "Thank you, Dr. T, for letting me keep my pictures," read the note. "I need them."

We all need our pictures. And it probably wouldn't hurt if we could be more gentle in dealing with one another's pictures.

Finding the right picture was important for the Bible writers, too. In fact, precisely in the area of the sanctuary we find God inspiring His messengers to share pictures that the people could understand. Two biblical contexts can serve to illustrate.

In Exodus 25:9 God told Moses to make the sanctuary "according to all that I show you concerning the pattern." Archaeologists have discovered that the pattern was similar in many respects to that of the Canaanite temples. Surprising? Yes—until we recognize that God wanted a house of worship to be recognized as a house of worship within that culture. The practices inside the Israelite sanctuary differed dramatically from those of the Canaanites. But at least a church looked like a church!

In Hebrews 8:5 we read that the earthly sanctuary was to serve as "a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary." If Exodus spoke to a Canaanite setting, then Hebrews spoke to the Greco-Roman world. And in that world, Plato's concept of the heavenly "ideals" was dominant: Whatever object one finds on earth is naturally a reflection of the true idea (or ideal) of that object in heaven. Understandably, then, the author of Hebrews would talk about the copy and the shadow.

For us, that means we should be rather cautious about turning our pictures into absolutes. Adventists probably have more difficulty with the visions of Ellen White than we do with Scripture, at least that has been my experience. Generally, students in my classes have been more prepared to live with a diversity of understanding of the biblical visions than they are with reference to Ellen White's. Yet the principle is the same.

I suspect that some of the conservative force in Adventism stems from the fact that the sanctuary doctrine was instrumental in leading Adventists to accept the Sabbath. Ellen White's vision of the ark in the heavenly

sanctuary and the "halo of glory" around the fourth command (EW, p. 255) played a key role originally in Adventism and still does in many circles.

That picture was vivid enough in my own thinking to cause a real jolt when I suddenly realized (I don't remember just when) that the Ten Commandments, especially the fourth, are meaningful only for this earth. Not only could the angels *not* worship on the same Sabbath as all of us, but they would not know what to do with the fifth or tenth commands or with any of the others in between.

As Ellen White observed later, Satan's rebellion brought law to the minds of the angels "almost as an awakening to something unthought of" (MB, p. 109).

I finally concluded that the vision of the halo around the fourth command was a powerful picture that accomplished its purpose in establishing the validity of Sabbathkeeping. It was not, however, a documentary of the heavenly reality.

In that connection, I have found a couple quotations from Ellen White to be useful. The net result of both is to caution us about moving too far toward either extreme in our conceptions of things heavenly.

"A fear of making the future inheritance seem too material has led many to spiritualize away the very truths which lead us to look upon it as our home. Christ assured His disciples that He went to prepare mansions for them in the Father's house. Those who accept the teachings of God's Word will not be wholly ignorant concerning the heavenly abode. And yet, 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him' (1 Cor. 2:9). Human language is inadequate to describe the reward of the righteous. It will be known only to those who behold it. No finite mind can comprehend the glory of the Paradise of God" (GC, pp. 674, 675).

"The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to

look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory" (1SM, p. 22).

If we could choose, we might want to avoid both the 1 and the 10 on the scale of concrete-abstract. Unfortunately, that is precisely the kind of thing we are often unable to choose. It is born into us and cemented in place by our environment. But we can ask the Lord to help us learn to let others live with their pictures.

A final word from that survey I have been referring to, in fact, from a woman who did not like my question at all. She ended up marking a 5 on the scale, under protest and quoting C. S. Lewis: "Some things are so terribly real we can't possibly imagine them."

I'm inclined to think that both she and he just might be right.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How can one best learn to look for *the point* of a vision without being distracted by the tensions between the concrete and the abstract?

2. What factors are likely to lead Adventists and other Christians away from the concrete realities of a future hope? Is it possible to retrace one's steps to a more conservative (concrete) position after one has moved to a more abstract one?

3. How important does the sanctuary continue to be for Adventists? Would the importance be enhanced or diminished by moving one direction or the other on the concrete-abstract scale?

CHAPTER
EIGHTEEN

Illustration 10
Inspired Writers Quoting Inspired Writers

Let the Writers Speak for Themselves

Synopsis: A casebook approach to Scripture means that one inspired writer cannot be the final interpreter of another. Both must be judged by a higher standard. Appropriately and logically, the Old Testament was the initial touchstone by which the claims of Jesus, the apostles, and ultimately the entire New Testament itself were judged (cf. Luke 24:44). But it is not appropriate, then, simply to turn around and impose the New Testament back onto the Old. Now that both Testaments are part of the canon, all writers must be allowed to speak for themselves.

Key Texts

Out of Egypt

Hosea 11:1-3: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them."

Matthew 2:14, 15: "And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt

have I called my son.' "

Let me start this chapter with a bold statement. *The writings of one inspired writer should never be the final interpreter of the writings of another inspired writer.* Put another way, and more specifically with reference to Scripture, the New Testament should not be allowed to bring our study of the Old Testament to a close. Indeed, every passage that comes by way of inspiration—that would include all of Scripture—should remain open for fresh insight and interpretation.

That position is not nearly as radical as it sounds. In fact, part of it is very conservative. In brief, I am arguing that the canon of Scripture must stay closed, complete, and secure. That's the conservative part. But Scripture, every last verse in the canon, must also stay alive and open to study and interpretation. That may be the radical part. But it makes good sense both spiritually and intellectually. Let's take a closer look in the light of Scripture.

A comparison of Matthew 2:15 and Hosea 11:1 would suggest to the unbiased reader that the two passages have very little to do with each other. Hosea was speaking about Israel's escape *from* Egypt; Matthew was talking about Jesus' escape *to* Egypt, ultimately returning again to Palestine after Herod died. Matthew and John are both fond of this kind of "proof." Mark and Luke use it much more sparingly.

Matthew includes 11 distinctive "fulfillments" of prophecies, of which this is one (Matt. 1:22, 23; 2:15, 17, 18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:14, 15, 35; 21:4, 5; 27:9, 10 [cited in Gundry, p. 24]). Matthew's labeling of these passages as having been fulfilled by Jesus overlays them with an additional emotional burden for us because they relate to Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.

At one point in my experience, after I had checked out Matthew's "fulfillments" of these Old Testament prophecies, my initial reaction was "If that's the kind of proof that establishes Jesus as the Messiah, no wonder the Jews rejected Him!" Though I have now resolved that issue to my own satisfaction, it is not the primary focus of our attention here. (See Thompson, *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* pp. 130-157).

Our specific concern here is how one inspired writer relates to the writings of another inspired writer. The passage from Matthew poses the question in terms of Old Testament versus New Testament. That is a crucial comparison, for in the development of the canon of Scripture, each

addition to the canon must be judged initially by that which is already normative in the canon.

Jesus' reference to all that must be "fulfilled" in the law, prophets, and psalms (Luke 24:44) indicates that the Old Testament was the touchstone by which He and His ministry were to be judged. And that is entirely appropriate.

But it would be inappropriate now simply to turn around and impose the New Testament interpretation on the Old. Since we have accepted both Testaments as canonical, I, for one, do not want to play off one writer against another. The spiritual side of me wants to respect both authors. But neither do I want to impose one writer on another, for the rational side of me wants to let each writer and each text speak its own message without outside interference.

In a sense, then, I am hiding behind the canon, for I want to say that whatever Matthew has done cannot jeopardize either the Old Testament or his own place in Scripture. In this connection, marriage strikes me as a helpful analogy: whatever reasons bring two people together, once they are married they are married! The formal period of courtship, when each seeks to win and convince the other, is past. Neither person is on trial anymore.

We all know that unfortunately relationships do collapse, both in the realm of faith and in marriage. In our sinful world, that which God has given to be a bulwark of security can fail. How do we keep that from happening? One way is to retrace our steps to the first courtship days and remember that which won our hearts then. While the on-trial aspects of courtship should end with marriage and be followed by a full sense of security, the marriage is more likely to be successful if some courting aspects continue.

Now let's apply that analogy more directly to Matthew. If we somehow "bless" all that we find in Matthew because his Gospel now belongs in the canon, we at least can try to find out *why* and *how* the book became part of canon in the first place. (Here the courtship analogy breaks down just a little, for the decision to include Matthew was not ours. It was made for us—more like a Middle Eastern marriage planned by the parents. Still, two points are clear: [1] The canonical decision has been made [that is, the marriage has been consummated, even if it was planned by the parents] and [2] Some kind of rationale lay behind the decision [that is, it was not totally random since either the parents or the couple themselves had some kind of reason in mind that resulted in marriage].)

In attempting to recover those original conditions under which the

Christian church accepted and believed Matthew, I discovered that his kind of logic and his methods of proof turn out to be just the kind of thing that thoughtful Jews of his day would appreciate. *Midrash* and *haggadah* are technical terms that refer to creative Jewish methods of expanding and expounding on Scripture. One characteristic of that kind of literature is the tendency to read later conclusions back into earlier writings and to treat the whole as a seamless garment.

I finally accepted the idea that Matthew had to win his way first in his world. His midrashic and haggadic arguments may not impress me (because the world has changed). But the fact that he did win his way in his world—by whatever means—does impress me.

For practical purposes, then, when it comes to interpreting individual passages, or even whole books, we are back to something like the law pyramid, with apparent contradictions at the level of detail, but with a consistent underlying harmony. Each writer and each passage illumines in some way the multiple aspects of the one, the two, and the ten commands.

While Matthew's usage of the Old Testament highlights the problem of how one inspired writer relates to another, a passage unencumbered with messianic overtones is more useful for illustrating how different interpretations of the same story can serve a practical and common purpose. And in that connection, the three biblical versions of Moses' killing of the Egyptian illustrate the point beautifully, a discovery I made thanks to Brevard Child's monumental commentary on Exodus. Recognizing a common focus on the law of love, means we don't have to press the three accounts into the same mold. We have three distinct molds, one each for Exodus, Acts, and Hebrews. But all three molds belong to the same set.

If you want to experience the joy of discovery for yourself, read carefully the following three accounts at this point before reading further.

Exodus 2:11-15 (original account): "One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He looked this way and that, and seeing

Acts 7:24-51 (Stephen's sermon): "And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking the Egyptian. *He supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his*

Hebrews 11:23-28 (by faith): "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict. By faith Moses, when he was grown up,

no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. When he went out the next day, behold, two Hebrews were struggling together; and he said to the man that did the wrong, 'Why do you strike your fellow?' He answered, 'Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?' *Then Moses was afraid, and thought, 'Surely the thing is known.'* When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses. But *Moses fled from Pharaoh*, and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well."

hand, but they did not understand. And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and would have reconciled them, saying 'Men, you are brethren, why do you wrong each other?' But the man who was wronging his neighbor *thrust him aside, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?* Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' At this retort Moses fled, and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. . . . This Moses *whom they refused, saying 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' God sent as both ruler and deliverer* by the hand of the angel that appeared to him in the bush. . . . Our fathers *refused to obey him, but thrust him aside*, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt. . . . You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, *you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.*"

refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, *not being afraid of the anger of the king*; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them."

In brief, the three stories all yield a different moral. Sometimes I have suggested that my students ask the following question of all three accounts: "Did Moses do the right thing when he killed the Egyptian?" While not entirely satisfactory, that question typically contributes to the following conclusions:

Exodus 2—Though no explicit condemnation of Moses' act appears in the text, the force of the narrative clearly indicates that the act was a wrongful demonstration of Moses' pride. Only when he had unlearned that pride, as described in Exodus 3 and 4, was he able to serve as Israel's deliverer.

Acts 7—Stephen's sermon draws quite a different moral from the story by focusing on the rebellious attitude of those whom Moses sought to help. The rejection of Moses is taken by Stephen as symbolic of Jewish rebellion through the ages. If the original story was a rebuke of Moses' pride, it has now become a rebuke of the rebellion of God's people.

Hebrews 11—Now in the context of a Christian exhortation to faith, the story is thoroughly transformed, as are several of the experiences recorded in Hebrews 11. The narrative emphasizes the high road of faith, not the low road of sin, pride, and rebellion. (Abraham and Sarah are also now people of noble faith. If you want to learn that Sarah laughed in the face of God's promise, you will not find it in Hebrews 11; you have to go back to the Old Testament.)

Most striking in the story of Moses is the statement that he left Egypt "not being afraid of the anger of the king" (verse 27). In Exodus his fear of the king was precisely the reason why he left.

But Hebrews is trying to tell us something deeper about fear and faith. The text also says that when Moses' parents hid him they "were not afraid of the king's edict" (verse 23). Now, why would they hide the child if they were not afraid? Of course they were afraid, just as was Moses when he fled from Pharaoh—but only in a superficial sense. Somehow a deeper trust knew that God would fulfill His purposes in the end.

And that is a beautiful message, an underlying harmony, that engulfs whatever superficial contradiction may exist between the texts. And for us, it means that we may be very much afraid on the surface, while cherishing a deep and abiding faith in our hearts.

It would greatly impoverish our reading of Scripture were we to feel we had to homogenize and harmonize the stories of Exodus 2, Acts 7, and Hebrews 11 into a single account. I don't think it is appropriate to insist that Acts and Hebrews conform to Exodus any more than Acts and

Hebrews should be allowed to dictate the interpretation of Exodus. Let each voice speak: the dangers of pride, the dangers of rebellion, and the beauty of an abiding faith—three lessons from a single story, and all very helpful for the Christian life today.

The importance of allowing inspired writers the freedom to adapt biblical passages in the service of a larger concern can also be illustrated from our Adventist history. Or put another way (which would be more precise—and more bold), inspired writers should not hinder ordinary believers (i.e., those not inspired in a special sense) from pursuing their God-given responsibilities to interpret the text of Scripture for themselves, *even if their interpretation may differ from that of a credentialed inspired writer.*

In other words, we must relieve inspired writers of the responsibility—which they never claimed in the first place—of being final interpreters of other inspired passages. If the point hasn't become perfectly clear yet for those of us who are Adventists, let me be blunt: we should not expect Ellen White to be the definitive commentator on Scripture, or its final interpreter. And that is where an illustration from Adventist history is most helpful.

The setting is the 1888 General Conference session. We can set the stage by laying side by side two seemingly contradictory statements from a devotional address by Ellen White that she gave to the General Conference session delegates on November 1, 1888. (MS 15, 1888 [see Appendix G]). She was talking about E. J. Waggoner, his interpretation of Scripture, and his message of righteousness by faith.

"Some interpretations of Scripture given by Dr. Waggoner I do not regard as correct."

"That which has been presented harmonizes perfectly with the light which God has been pleased to give me during all the years of my experience."

How could she disagree with Waggoner's interpretation of Scripture while claiming, almost in the same breath, that his message harmonized perfectly with her experience?

Possibly in the same way that Acts 7 and Hebrews 11 take different approaches to Exodus 2 while their applications harmonize perfectly with the law pyramid of the one, the two, and the ten.

(The complete sermon in which Ellen White's comments are found is included in the appendix to A. V. Olson's *Thirteen Crisis Years* [reprint of

Through Crisis to Victory], pp. 303-311. The whole book gives a fascinating account of that tumultuous era in Adventist history, 1888-1901. But the appendix alone, containing Ellen White's 1888 devotionals, is well worth the price of the book.)

In the sermon just quoted, Ellen White not only states that she disagrees with some of Waggoner's interpretations of Scripture, but goes on to say: "But I believe him to be perfectly honest in his views, and I would respect his feelings and treat him as a Christian gentleman. I have no reason to think that he is not as much esteemed of God as are any of my brethren, and I shall regard him as a Christian brother, so long as there is no evidence that he is unworthy. The fact that he honestly holds some views of Scripture differing from yours or mine is no reason why we should treat him as an offender, or as a dangerous man, and make him the subject of unjust criticism."

Ellen White did not see her special prophetic authority as overruling Waggoner's right to take a different view of certain Scriptures. She and Waggoner could disagree and still be wholehearted members of the same body of Christ. At the same time, even though she and Waggoner did not see eye to eye on some individual passages of Scripture (in this instance, Galatians 3), she still could exclaim that his message harmonized perfectly with her entire experience.

In short, hearty endorsement of the main point of Waggoner's message did not require acceptance of all his supporting arguments, illustrations, or interpretations of specific passages of Scripture.

To insist that we all view Scripture alike, or that a particular interpretation of a particular passage be enforced somehow, can easily cripple the spiritual forces of the church.

In 1892 Ellen White wrote: "We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and thus root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement."

On what, then, must we agree?

"The great truths of the Word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them. When as individual members of the church, you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, there will be no need of labored efforts to be in unity, for there will be oneness in Christ as a natural result" (MS 24, 1892 [larger excerpt in Appendix G]).

Supreme love for God and for His creatures—those are the "great two." Every interpretation of Scripture should point in that direction. What we have overlooked, perhaps, is that two people, even two inspired writers, can take up the same passage of Scripture, each interpreting it differently, but both pointing their interpretation toward the fulfillment of the one, the two, and the ten. That is clearly the case in Scripture. Maybe we need to be brave enough to say so just a little bit louder than we have in the past.

In summary, let's spell out three conclusions that should be evident as a result of the discussion above.

1. If you want to know what the Old Testament says, read the Old Testament.

2. If you want to know what the New Testament says, read the New Testament.

3. If you want to know what Ellen White says, read the writings of Ellen White.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. When we listen to a sermon or read a book, is the point destroyed and the argument invalid if we disagree with the use of an illustration or an interpretation of Scripture? At what level does disagreement destroy communication and trust?

2. Could you imagine circumstances in your church in which a study group could actually meet for the study of Scripture and the participants would be able to say, for example, "I understand that Old Testament passage differently than Paul does"? Would such a statement imply loss of confidence in Paul?

3. What would happen to our ability to work together if we focused every act of interpreting Scripture toward the task of expounding the one, the two, and the ten? Would we lose our cutting edge in outreach? Or would we enhance our outreach?

CHAPTER
NINETEEN

Illustration 11
Numbers, Genealogies, Dates

Amram's Brothers Were Really Prolific

Synopsis: We should not require a higher level of precision for biblical numbers, genealogies, and dates than is evident in Scripture itself. But since casual reading suggests conclusions that do not hold up when we analyze the biblical material more closely, the church must find ways to allow both the casual and the analytical reader to live at peace with their respective conclusions. Perhaps it would help if we could see numbers, genealogies, and dates as interesting (even fascinating) rather than crucial—and leave it at that.

Key Texts

Genesis 15:13-16: "Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for *four hundred years*; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the *fourth generation*; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.' "

1 Chronicles 2:1-20: "These are the sons of *Israel*: Reuben, Simeon, *Levi* [1], *Judah* [1], Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, *Joseph* [1], Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. The sons of *Judah* [1]: Er, Onan, and Shelah; these three Bathshua the Canaanitess bore to him. Now Er, Judah's

first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he slew him. His daughter-in-law Tamar also bore him *Perez* [2] and Zerah. Judah had five sons in all. The *sons of Perez* [2]: *Hezron* [3] and Hamul. The sons of Zerah: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Dara, five in all. The sons of Carmi: Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the matter of the devoted thing; and Ethan's son was Azariah. The sons of *Hezron* [3], that were born to him: Jerahmeel, Ram [4] and *Chelubai* [4]. Ram [4] was the father of Amminadab [5], and Amminadab [5] was the father of Nahshon [6], prince of the sons of Judah. Nahshon [6] was the father of Salma [7], Salma [7] of Boaz [8], Boaz [8] of Obed [9], Obed [9] of Jesse [10]. Jesse [10] was the father of Eliab his first-born, Abinadab the second, Shimea the third, Nethanel the fourth, Raddai the fifth, Ozem the sixth, David [11] the seventh; and their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. The sons of Zeruaiah: Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, three. Abigail bore Amasa, and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite. *Caleb* [4] the son of *Hezron* [3] had children by his wife Azubah, and by Jerioth; and these were her sons: Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon. When Azubah died, *Caleb* [4] married Ephrath, who bore him *Hur* [5]. *Hur* [5] was the father of *Uri* [6], and *Uri* [6] was the father of *Bezalel* [7]."

1 Chronicles 6:1-3: "The sons of *Levi* [1]: Gershom, *Kohath* [2], and Merari. The sons of *Kohath* [2]: *Amram* [3], Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The children of *Amram* [3]: *Aaron* [4], *Moses* [4], and Miriam. The sons of Aaron [4]: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar."

1 Chronicles 7:23-27: "And *Ephraim* [2] went in to his wife, and she conceived and bore a son; and he called his name *Beriah* [3], because evil had befallen his house. His daughter was Sheerah, who built both Lower and Upper Bethhoron, and Uzzensheerah. *Rephah* [4] was his son, *Resheph* [5] his son, *Telah* [6] his son, *Tahan* [7] his son, *Ladan* [8] his son, *Ammihud* [9] his son, *Elishama* [10] his son, *Nun* [11] his son, *Joshua* [12] his son."

Numbers 1:45, 46: "So the whole number of the people of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and upward, every man able to go forth to war in Israel—their whole number was *six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty*."

Numbers 3:43: "And all the first-born males, according to the number of names, from a month old and upward as numbered were *twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three*."

Numbers 3:27, 28: "Of *Kohath* [2] were the family of the *Amramites* [3], and the family of the Uzzielites; these are the families of the

Kohathites [2]. According to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, there were *eight thousand six hundred*, attending to the duties of the sanctuary."

Matthew 1:1-17: "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham [1] was the father of Isaac [2], and Isaac [2] the father of Jacob [3], and Jacob [3] the father of Judah [4] and his brothers, and Judah [4] the father of Perez [5] and Zerah by *Tamar*, and Perez [5] the father of Hezron [6], and Hezron [6] the father of Ram [7], and Ram [7] the father of Amminadab [8], and Amminadab [8] the father of Nahshon [9] and Nahshon [9] the father of Salmon [10], and Salmon [10] the father of Boaz [11] by *Rahab*, and Boaz [11] the father of Obed [12] by *Ruth*, and Obed [12] the father of Jesse [13], and Jesse [13] the father of David [14] the king. And David [14] was the father of Solomon [1] by the *wife of Uriah*, and Solomon [1] the father of Rehoboam [2], and Rehoboam [2] the father of Abijah [3], and Abijah [3] the father of Asa [4], and Asa [4] the father of Jehoshaphat [5], and Jehoshaphat [5] the father of Joram [6], and Joram [6] the father of *[cf. 1 Chron. 3:11, 12: Ahaziah (6a), Joash (6b), Amaziah (6c)]* Uzziah [7], and Uzziah [7] the father of Jotham [8], and Jotham [8] the father of Ahaz [9], and Ahaz [9] the father of Hezekiah [10], and Hezekiah [10] the father of Manasseh [11], and Manasseh [11] the father of Amos [12], and Amos [12] the father of Josiah [13], and Josiah [13] the father of Jechoniah [14] and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah [14] was the father of Shealtiel [1], and Shealtiel [1] the father of Zerubbabel [2], and Zerubbabel [2] the father of Abiud [3], and Abiud [3] the father of Eliakim [4], and Eliakim [4] the father of Azor [5], and Azor [5] the father of Zadok [6], and Zadok [6] the father of Achim [7], and Achim [7] the father of Eliud [8], and Eliud [8] the father of Eleazar [9] and Eleazar [9] the father of Matthan [10], and Matthan [10] the father of Jacob [11], and Jacob [11] the father of Joseph [12] the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus [13] was born, who is called Christ. So all the generations from Abraham to David were *fourteen* generations [actual total of up to 21 generations, adding seven generations from 1 Chronicles 7:23-27 on analogy, with Joshua being in the twelfth generation from Jacob compared with Moses being in the fourth], and from David to the deportation to Babylon *fourteen* generations *[actual total of at least 17 generations, adding three generations from 1 Chronicles 3:10, 11]*, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ *fourteen* generations *[Luke 3 lists*

names (all different except Shealtiel and Zerubbabel) that total 23 generations for the same period]."

Deadly Dull but Dangerous

You took one look at the key texts and almost skipped this chapter, right? That's why my original plan for this book did not include it. *Boring, technical, volatile*—those are all words that could describe what we are about to discuss.

But if you were brave enough to get this far, we should be able to move ahead rather boldly. First, let's note two general problems. Then we can move more directly into the evidence.

1. The difference between casual and analytical reading. Casual readers may not realize some of the more complex problems lurking behind the scenes. As a result, seemingly obvious conclusions can break down when the evidence in Scripture is analyzed more closely.

Given the great variety of people in the church, however, I believe we must make room for both casual and analytical reading. To that end, it would be helpful if we could avoid reinforcing casual observations with dire warnings and heavy dogmatic arguments. Yet that is precisely the danger when believers fear the slippery slope, the camel's nose, and the falling dominoes.

2. The danger of building proofs on the basis of casual reading. When casual reading is combined with the fear of the slippery slope, great weight can be attached to lesser matters. If these lesser matters then become part of a larger argument "proving" the validity of Scripture, faith is at risk when the analytical overtakes the casual.

The evidence in Scripture suggests that we should be cautious about placing too much weight on numbers and genealogies and on the dates linked with them. Ideally, we should be able to see numbers and genealogies as interesting—even fascinating—but not crucial. Otherwise, fear could lead us away from sound conclusions. And the absence of sound conclusions could turn our fears into self-fulfilling prophecies.

Amram's Brothers

To introduce the evidence, let's pick up the story behind our playful chapter title, "Amram's Brothers Were Really Prolific." It can illustrate how the difference between casual and analytical reading can get us into difficulty.

If I were to ask the typical church member how many people left Egypt

at the time of the Exodus, they would likely answer, "Millions." And we could consider that answer to be biblical. Exodus 12:37 says that 600,000 men, besides women and children, left Egypt under Moses' direction. Numbers 1:46 gives 603,550 as the number of men 20 years old and above. Similar figures are found in Exodus 38:26 and Numbers 2:32; 11:21; 26:51. Adding the women and children yields a figure close to 2 million (cf. PP, p. 334) or, stated more generally, "millions" (cf. PP, p. 410).

But if we read Numbers 3:43 analytically, we are startled to learn that the number of *firstborn* males from 1 month old and upward was 22,273. The implications are intriguing. If we accept both figures as being correct (603,550 adult males more than 20 years and 22,273 *firstborn* males 1 month old and above), we would need to distribute all the males into 22,273 families. The results, translated into family size, are as follows:

27 adult males per family (603,550 divided by 22,273)
27 adult females per family
13 juvenile males per family (estimated 300,000 males under 20)
13 juvenile females per family
80 average number of children per family

Now let's push the averages. How many children did Amram and Jochebed have? We know of two sons, Aaron and Moses (Ex. 6:2), and one daughter, Miriam (Ex. 15:20). If there were only three children, the next family would need 157 offspring to make up the shortfall in the average.

But we can make the picture even more vivid, and this is where our chapter title comes in. In Numbers 3:27 (see key texts) we read that Amram and his three brothers (Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel) had 8,600 male descendants (1 month old and upward) at the time of the Exodus, an average of 2,150 per family. Adding in the women yields an average of 4,300 children per family. Prolific would be an understatement. But if Amram had only two sons, each of the other three brothers would have had to father some 700 more sons, plus daughters.

Either something is dreadfully wrong with the numbers or Amram was not Moses' father but his great-great-great-great grandfather (the number of generations is just a "guesstimate"). Indeed, both numbers and genealogies are involved in the problem. And there is other subtle evidence in Scripture to suggest that the group leaving Egypt was smaller than 2 million.

But immediately we are confronted by three different slippery slopes.

Let's identify them right here so that we can control any potential panic before moving on.

1. Confidence in Scripture. If we cannot trust the biblical record *here*, can we trust it *elsewhere*?

2. The Miraculous. If we reduce the number of people who left Egypt, are we undermining the miraculous in Scripture?

3. Confidence in Ellen White. If Ellen White cites the figure of 2 million and if we conclude that there were significantly fewer involved, can we trust *her* as an inspired writer?

We address the Ellen White issue specifically in Appendix E, though it is helpful to recognize that the same "problems" appear in Scripture. The basic question in both instances is whether or not trustworthiness requires absolute perfection. If Scripture is viewed as a philosophical treatise, a scientific document, or a transcript of matters purely divine, then perhaps one could speak of the one fatal flaw. But if Scripture is more like a family letter or a letter from a dear friend and if we determine the trustworthiness of Scripture in much the same way as we do a trustworthy person, then absolute perfection is not required; it could even be counterproductive. "The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language," wrote Ellen White. "Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect" (1SM, p. 20). Some of the people who are most precious to me are actually more precious because of supposed flaws and imperfections that have become part of a new beauty. In a perfect world I suspect it won't be that way anymore. But in our twisted world God has so blessed us that we can turn the ordinary and the troublesome into sources of beauty and blessing.

In the first manuscript reproduced in *Selected Messages,* book 1, I sense Ellen White struggling to communicate a message like that about the Bible. She yearns for her readers to have such an experience with God, that the Bible, as a letter from God, will be both precious and safe to read. "I take the Bible just as it is, as the Inspired Word," she writes. And again: "Men should let God take care of His own Book, His living oracles, as He has done for ages" (1SM, p. 17). Or, "Brethren, cling to your Bible, as it reads, and stop your criticisms in regard to its validity, and obey the Word, and not one of you will be lost." In conclusion she expresses gratitude that God has given us a Bible for the poor as well as the learned. Particularly interesting is her comment about the individual possessing "large talents of mental powers." Such a one, she notes, "will find in the oracles of God

treasures of truth, beautiful and valuable," but also "difficulties and secrets and wonders" that will yield "the highest satisfaction to study during a long lifetime, and yet there is an infinity beyond" (1SM, p. 18). In all this I find no evidence that the believer should be in dread of that fatal flaw. No, God and His book have proven their worth. The believer is at peace with both.

In that very connection we must remind ourselves that the all-or-nothing position is not a biblical one, even if it has been proclaimed by great men and spiritual giants. John Wesley, for example, wrote in his journal of August 24, 1776: "Nay, if there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth" (Wesley/Curnock, vol. VI, p. 117). With all due respect to Wesley, the all-or-nothing argument is quite misleading and can be deadly. It does reflect a powerful psychological tendency, to be sure, one often reinforced by devout believers in their zeal to defend Scripture. But it is not a response dictated by Scripture itself.

Interestingly enough, our daily interaction with people and events typically reflects a much more practical approach. Imagine, for example, two normally trustworthy students rushing excitedly into class and exclaiming that they just saw an accident at the corner of College Avenue and Fourth Street. One reports three people were injured, the other just two. Would I be justified in concluding that there was no accident at all? On the contrary, one *obvious* conclusion would be that there indeed had been an accident! Only the details are uncertain. Yet for some strange reason, when it comes to Scripture, the received view is that one "error" would nullify the whole.

That is precisely the danger of a *theoretical* approach to inspiration. A *practical* approach using the *incarnational* model allows for the mysterious blending of the human and divine. Then the Bible is no longer held captive to the fear of the fatal flaw, but is accepted on the same basis as a trustworthy account from a reliable friend.

If, however, one is inclined to accept the all-or-nothing stance toward Scripture, then the first two slippery slopes (confidence in Scripture and belief in the miraculous) can funnel into a single grand slide that drops the believer into the abyss of agnosticism and atheism. For without confidence in Scripture how can one believe the biblical accounts of divine intervention into human history? For that very reason, rationalists do not simply question how many people went out in the Exodus, they question if there even was such an event. (See Appendix F.)

Taking a more practical approach to the matter allows us to recognize that asking *how many* is not the same as asking *whether.* Anyone who has been a summer camp counselor for just one unit of eight juniors knows that it would take a miracle to lead them through the wilderness. A smaller number of Israelites would still require a whole series of miraculous interventions: the path through the sea, water from the rock, and manna, for starters. So even if asking *how many* ends up reducing the estimate of the number of Israelites leaving Egypt, the miraculous element remains very much alive. And if at the same time we thereby address some of our minor rational difficulties (minor because the credibility of the account does not rest on our ability to resolve them all), the biblical story becomes more powerful and effective.

So let us look more closely at the minor rational difficulties that arise if we adopt the figure of 2 million as representing the number of Israelites leaving Egypt: How could that many people make it through the Red Sea in a hurry? How could that many people camp around Mount Sinai? How could that many people march around Jericho, a 10-acre site? How does that large a population fit into Palestine when even today modern Israel has a population under 4 million? Without questioning the *whether* of the Exodus at all, Scripture itself contains suggestions that help us address the question of *how many.*

My first exposure to this problem and the suggested solutions came from Dr. Siegfried Horn, professor of Old Testament in the seminary at Andrews University in the mid-sixties. I have wished that a printed explanation had been more readily available to the church, as it could have tempered our dogmatism in a number of instances.

Both numbers and genealogies are involved with the problem. And we address both below. Dr. Horn, however, while helping us with the problem of large numbers in the Old Testament, was very cautious on the matter of genealogies. Whenever asked, he would pick up his Bible and turn to one of two texts: "Avoid foolish questions, and genealogies" (Titus 3:9, KJV), or "Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith" (1 Tim. 1:4, KJV). I can still hear his charming Dutch/German accent as he would point to the text and say with a sheepish grin, "I do that."

Horn's first step in dealing with the problem of the number of people involved in the Exodus was to recognize some counterbalancing evidence from Scripture itself. Exodus 1:15, for example, implies that there were *two* midwives serving the Hebrew people at the time Moses was born,

Shiphrah and Puah. How large a population could only two midwives serve? Eighty years later, would one have expected a population of 2 million? Not likely.

Then he led us to Deuteronomy 7 and Moses' words of counsel to Israel as Moses approached the end of his own ministry. There on the borders of Canaan, Moses counseled Israel and warned of the dangers that would face them as they entered Canaan. He ticked off a list of "seven nations greater and mightier than yourselves" (Deut. 7:1). He described Israel as the "fewest of all peoples" (verse 7). Finally, Moses promised that "the Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little; you may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you" (verse 22). It doesn't sound as though Moses was describing a throng of 2 million people.

Our modest rational problems can be resolved more easily if we project a smaller number of people based on (1) the 22,273 firstborn males, (2) the inference from Exodus 1 that two midwives served all Israel just 80 years earlier, and (3) the implications of the statement that Israel was the "fewest of all peoples."

When I have used this illustration in class, many of the students really struggle to find ways to make both figures fit, the 600,000 adult males and the 22,273 firstborn. They don't want to admit that either one could be wrong.

So why did the Lord allow such differences? In my view, He wants us to know that the number of people involved in the Exodus is not that crucial. God led a motley crowd out of Egypt, performed miracle after miracle in the wilderness, and finally brought them to Canaan. That is the punch line of the story. And that is what counts.

When I take time in class to go over the genealogies or the number of people involved in the Exodus, I actually tell my students that we are going to take whatever time we need to convince them that we don't need to take that much time about such things! Put another way: the conclusion that the numbers are *not* all that important is so important that we will take two precious days of class time just to convince them.

We turn now to some more specific information on numbers, genealogies, and dates. We will look at additional evidence supporting the possibility that the numbers cited in the Old Testament have been distorted. When we look at genealogies, we will consider the possibility that Amram and Jochebed were Moses' ancestors, but not his parents. As we note below, genealogies show line of descent, but not necessarily direct

descent. Thus one genealogical list in Scripture records Moses in the *fourth* generation from Jacob, another puts Bezalel in the *seventh* generation, and yet another has Joshua in the *twelfth*. Yet all three men were contemporaries. Interestingly enough, the story of Moses' birth does not mention Amram, Jochebed, or Miriam by name. The story simply begins: "Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi" (Ex. 2:1). Finally, if the number of generations between Amram and Moses is uncertain, we may need to take a fresh look at the date for the Exodus.

The Problem of Large Numbers in the Old Testament

One key variable in the discussion of Old Testament numbers is the ambiguity in the meaning of the Hebrew word *'aleph*, the usual word for thousand. It can be translated in each of the following ways: (1) ox—"Our *oxen* will draw heavy loads" (Ps. 144:14, NIV); (2) clan—"Though you are small among the *clans* of Judah" (Micah 5:2, NIV); (3) captain—"Thou hast taught them to be *captains*" (Jer. 13:21, KJV; cf. Matthew's quotation of Micah 5:2 "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the *rulers* of Judah" [Matt. 2:6]); and (4) thousand—"Though thou be little among the *thousands* of Judah" (Micah 5:2, KJV).

The implications of this ambiguity could be significant if one were recording (or reading about) the various elements going out to battle. The same word could mean 1,000 men, one chieftain, or one fighting unit. One would have to look at the record and ask, Were there 100,000 who went out to fight? or 100 units? or 100 chieftains? The variations in the handling of Micah 5:2 illustrate the ambiguity. The KJV opted for *thousands*, the NIV went with *clans*, and Matthew, translating from Hebrew to Greek, chose *rulers*.

We cannot prove the point, of course, but the remarkable ambiguity possible with the Hebrew word for thousand may very well lie behind some of the huge numbers in the Old Testament, numbers that seem much too large to us. We may still have monumental miracles without insisting on quite so many people. The evidence from Scripture suggests that we should allow for that kind of flexibility in Scripture.

It seems to me that a *careful* study of the use of numbers in Scripture suggests that we should be willing to allow the inspired writers some latitude. In other words, if we study the matter *carefully*, we can discover when and where we should *not* require precision from the inspired writers.

Sometimes even very small numbers do not mesh. In the Synoptic

Gospels, for example, as we have noted, it is not clear whether the cock crowed once or twice before Peter denied his Lord the third time (see Chapter 16). Dewey Beegle argues that it shouldn't make that much difference: "What essential difference is there if the other Gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, follow the general tradition of the cock's crowing just once? (Whereas Mark says the cock crowed twice.) All three Gospels contain the historical features necessary to convey the truth of the matter: the prediction of denial and Peter's boast, the fulfillment of the prediction, and Peter's remorse on remembering the words of Jesus" (Beegle, p. 193; cited in Lindsell, p. 174).

Now, I happen to think that Beegle is essentially correct. However, Harold Lindsell, the defender of inerrancy, does not agree: "It is the same old story: never mind the details that are in error; what the writers intended to say comes through despite the errancy of the divergent accounts. How do we respond to this challenge?" (Lindsell, p. 174). Lindsell then produces his harmonization, which yields three crowings of the cock and six denials.

Ironically, while Lindsell refuses to allow that kind of flexibility in the inspired writers, he himself reveals a kind of carelessness with details that too often has discredited the scholarship of conservative Christians. On pages 36 and 37 of *The Battle for the Bible*, Lindsell reveals a vague awareness of the problem involving the Hebrew word for thousand. He argues that "a copyist's mistake is something entirely different from an error in Scripture." Then he adds: "Furthermore, it has always been acknowledged that Hebrew numbers are a problem because the differences between the Hebrew words for a hundred and a thousand are so slight that a much-handled manuscript could be misread."

If Lindsell intended to refer to the problem with the word "thousand" as discussed above, he should have said simply that the translation of the Hebrew word for thousand is ambiguous, not that the words for hundred and thousand are similar in *form*. In Hebrew the words for hundred and thousand are not any more similar in form than are the English words! Using the consonantal equivalents in our alphabet, thousand is *'aleph*; hundred is *me'ah*. None of these Hebrew letters would ever be confused with each other.

Perhaps I should not be so hard on Lindsell. But I happen to think that his argument is more misleading than whether the cock crowed once or twice in the story of Peter's denial. But on second thought, maybe Lindsell's slip is closer to Paul's lapse in memory when he said initially

that he hadn't baptized any of the Corinthians—then proceeded to remember several (1 Cor. 1:14-16). Or maybe it is like the author of Hebrews, who quoted Psalm 8 but couldn't remember the reference, so simply said: "It has been testified somewhere" (Heb. 2:6). Or maybe it is like Matthew (or was it Jesus Himself?) who referred to the murder of Zechariah the son of *Barachiah* (Matt. 23:35) when he intended to refer to Zechariah the son of *Jehoiada* (2 Chron. 24:20). Or maybe it is like Matthew's reference to *Jeremiah* when he intended to refer to *Zechariah* (Matt. 27:9, 10, citing loosely Zech. 11:12, 13).

Is the slippery slope so dangerous that we cannot allow the Bible writers to share the common foibles of humanity? I must admit that if I really believed in inerrancy, I would be frightened by the kind of material discussed in this chapter. That, of course, was why I avoided writing it at first. Many Adventists consciously or unconsciously accept inerrancy, as do some 60 percent of all Americans.

Unfortunately, the topic will always be volatile. I hope that burying this chapter toward the end of the book might help. If only we would be willing to let the Bible writers do it the way they have done it and not insist that they stand on their heads nor we on ours, trying to force our concept of inspiration in ways that simply cannot fit the evidence!

Once we get over our need to harmonize all the details, fear disappears and we can turn to the all-important task of listening to the essential message of Scripture, seeking to understand His will so that His truth can live in us.

If you have caught the implications of what we have discussed thus far, you may have thought of a very practical question: If we conclude that Amram and Jochebed were not Moses' parents but his ancestors much further back, how will we tell the Bible story? What should we say to the children in Sabbath school and to our own children at home about the parents of the little boy rescued from the river? I suspect Amram and Jochebed are with us to stay, given the fact that the casual conclusion is so readily available from Scripture. But at some point our children and our church members will need to become aware of the intriguing situation with the numbers, lest they be afraid when actually they have nothing to fear.

Genealogies

We have already suggested that the ancients did not use genealogies in the same way that we do. The following analysis (informed in part by

Lawrence Geraty's 1974 article) notes some of the more prominent features of key biblical genealogies:

1. Genealogies are often included in Scripture for purposes transcending both history and chronology. Let's consider some possible interpretations of some significant biblical genealogies.

Genesis 5 and 11: Illustrating the Impact of the Flood—The lists of names for the first 20 patriarchs include the patriarch's age at the birth of his first son and his age at death. Those ages seem to suggest that we could use them for purposes of chronological dating. And since these lists provide the only actual figures that *might* tell us how much time elapsed between Creation and the Flood, and between the Flood and Abraham, it is not unexpected to find Christians using the figures to compute time and establish dates.

There is a distinct possibility, however, that the ages were included primarily to illustrate the stark impact of the Flood on human life. Before the Flood the great men of earth lived nearly 1,000 years each. After the Flood life expectancy dropped dramatically.

Another factor that makes it unwise to put too much weight on those numbers for chronological purposes is that all three of the earliest texts of Genesis give different numbers and different totals for the first 20 patriarchs:

Masoretic Text (Hebrew):	1,946 years
Samaritan Pentateuch (Hebrew):	2,247 years
Septuagint (Greek):	3,412 years

The Masoretic Text (MT) is the official Jewish Bible. It takes its name from the Masoretes, a group of devout Jewish scribes, living between A.D. 500 and 1,000, who dedicated their lives to copying the Hebrew Bible, doing so, incidentally, with incredible accuracy.

The ages listed in most modern translations of Genesis 5 and 11 reflect the Masoretic textual tradition. Even though the oldest copy of the MT comes from around A.D. 1000 (during the medieval period Jews burned their old Bibles), the MT is still highly regarded as a reliable text.

In comparison with the MT, the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) adds some 300 years to the ages of the patriarchs. The SP is simply another independent witness to the Hebrew text. It is the Bible of the Samaritans, which they copied and preserved apart from the MT textual tradition after they and the Jews parted company some time after the fifth century B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 17 and Ezra 4). The oldest known SP manuscript is the Nablus

Scroll, dating from the early Christian centuries. For the full Pentateuch, it varies from the MT in about 6,000 instances, though the variants are mostly minor. In some 1,600 places it agrees with the Septuagint over against the MT.

The Septuagint (LXX) is the most intriguing here, for in comparison with the MT it adds 1,466 years to the total ages for the patriarchs, most of which comes from the addition of a hundred years to each of the patriarch's ages after the Flood. Some scholars have suggested that a scribe felt the patriarchs in the second set were much too young when they had their first sons, so he systematically added a hundred years to the age of each before the birth of a son. The LXX also adds the name of Cainan between Shelah and Arphaxad, a variant reflected in Luke 3:36. Originally produced some 200 years before Christ, the major LXX manuscripts available to us were preserved by Christians.

In addition to the variation between the three major text types for Genesis, another more subtle element from those early chapters is the *impression* (and it is only an impression) that a great gulf exists between Abraham and the earlier patriarchs. If the years recorded in the MT are correct, Abraham's life overlapped with Shem's. That being the case, how was it possible that Abraham's own family could serve other gods (Joshua 24:2)? that Abraham himself could consider child sacrifice an appropriate way to serve God—until God used that very method to teach him otherwise? or that he could take another wife without considering it a sin (cf. PP, p. 145)?

Typically, Christians adopt the faith stance of Hebrews 11 and apply it consciously or unconsciously to the entire Bible. We might call that approach the "high road" because it emphasizes continuity and faith. By contrast, a "low road" approach, especially for the Old Testament, allows us to recognize how far the people had fallen. Specifically, with reference to Abraham, if we assume that there was a firm, clear connection through the patriarchs back to Adam, then we really are at a loss to explain the considerable gap between what Abraham was supposed to have known and what he actually did. I find it much more helpful to say that he was being consistent with his conscience and knowledge, recognizing that the link with Adam through Noah and Seth was apparently a very fragile one. That is certainly the impression I get when I read the Genesis account of Abraham's life. But it is only an impression. It does help me understand Abraham's experience, however, and at the same time places a very positive light on the God of the Old Testament, a God who turns out to be

remarkably patient as He reaches down to a people far removed from Him.

That impression of a long period of time between Abraham and the earlier patriarchs has led some to suggest that the Genesis record simply provides sample ages and that the real purpose was to illustrate the stark impact of the Flood on human life. Perhaps the best illustration of a genealogy being a list of sample characters comes from the period between Jacob and the Exodus. As indicated in the key texts and briefly noted above, one list puts Moses in the fourth generation, Bezelel in the seventh, and Joshua in the twelfth.

The biblical figures for the first 20 patriarchs were used by Archbishop Ussher in his Old Testament chronology, published in 1650-1654. When I was a youngster playing Bible Seek (now reissued as Bible Scramble) we memorized his dates for Creation and the Flood: 4004 and 2348 B.C. If Ussher's 4004 B.C. seems too precise for us, his contemporary John Lightfoot was even more so: Creation was on September 12; Adam was created at 9 a.m., sinned the same day at noon, and was promised salvation at 3 p.m. (Lighfoot/Pitman, vol. VII, pp. 372, 377).

Beginning in 1701, Ussher's dates were published in the margins of the King James Version of the Bible. That may explain why the 6,000-year figure became so thoroughly ingrained in Christian circles. To borrow a phrase from Ellen White, Ussher's dates came to be accepted as "facts," "well-known and universally acknowledged by the Protestant world" (GC, p. xi).

As the relatively new science of archaeology began to unlock the ancient secrets of early civilizations in the nineteenth century, it became difficult to mesh Ussher's chronology with what was being discovered about ancient history. His date for the Flood is particularly problematic. If, as many Christians have assumed, the Flood was universal, it should have obliterated all traces of civilization. But for the centers of the two major ancient civilizations, Babylon and Egypt, recorded history extends uninterrupted back to at least 3100 B.C. However, for ordinary Christians who had Ussher's dates printed "in the Bible," it was easy to conclude that these new scientists were destroying faith.

A more recent example comes from the mid-1970s, when the world of biblical scholarship was treated to rich finds from the ancient city of Ebla, a 70-acre site in northern Syria. According to the archaeologists, Ebla reached its peak about 2500 B.C., when it was the administrative center for more than a quarter of a million people. Again, continuous occupation at the site rules out the possibility of a flood before that time. And the size of

the population served by the city would suggest that a universal flood would have to have occurred centuries earlier.

Those familiar with modern trends know that the pervasive scholarly view, except among some conservative Christians, is that the account of the Flood in Genesis has its roots in a more localized event.

One could argue, of course, as many Christians do, that the primary concern of the Flood story is to pass judgment on human sin. For the moral to stand out sharp and clear, one does not necessarily need to argue for a *universal* flood.

However, to argue against a flood on philosophical grounds—that is, that a miraculous intervention by God is *a priori* impossible—is a much more serious departure from the boundaries of traditional Christian faith. As an aside, I would add that I have always been intrigued by the wide distribution of flood stories throughout the cultures of the world. For me, at least, that provides an important echo of the biblical account.

What is particularly interesting about the recorded history in the ancient Near East is that while it provides no support for those who want a more precise fit for Ussher's chronology, the sudden appearance of recorded civilization in or around the fourth millennium presents a sharp contrast with the typical evolutionary estimates that the history of modern man goes back some 100,000 years. The beginning of recorded history at or around 4000 B.C. is just yesterday compared with that 100,000-year estimate. For that reason, a number of Adventist scholars (who generally prefer not to be quoted) are willing to say that the world is relatively young, in terms of thousands of years rather than millions.

The comparatively recent beginning for recorded history suggests that the impression left by the biblical account—namely, that the world is relatively young—is believable. That does not constitute an argument for Ussher's chronology, however. And the precise age of the earth and any estimated date for Creation still does not speak to the *fact* of Creation. For that reason, I believe it wise to keep the questions of the age of the earth and the fact of Creation separate. One does not depend on the other.

Chronicles: Legitimating the Lines of David and Levi—The Chronicler, writing at the end of the Old Testament period, was particularly interested in reaffirming the glories of the Temple and the might of the house of David. Accordingly, the genealogies of Chronicles add a note of authenticity to both the Davidic and Levitical lines.

Interestingly enough, it is possible, though it cannot be proven, that some of the key religious leaders during the judges and early monarchy

may have been adopted into the tribe of Levi and given a Levitical genealogy. Both Eli and Zadok, whose genealogies are rather anomalous, would be candidates for such adoption. In any event, the genealogies in Chronicles are concerned with legitimizing a bloodline, not in establishing dates.

Matthew 1: Illustrating the Quality of Jesus' Ancestry—A study of Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (see key texts) reveals a remarkable perspective on mathematics. Not only does he omit names (Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah) to arrive at his 14-14-14 scheme, but he also must have counted Jehoiachin in both the second and third clusters to arrive at 14 names for each. Furthermore, when compared with other genealogical lists covering the same time period, the other lists consistently include more names: at least seven more for the first group, three more for the second, and nine more for the third (see key texts).

But the most striking feature of Matthew's list is his inclusion of four women in Jesus' genealogy, an unheard-of feature in proper Jewish circles. And all four women are "exceptional": Tamar, a Canaanite who bore Perez through incest; the Palestinian Rahab, a former prostitute; the Moabitess Ruth, who, though morally faultless, was still technically banned from Israel because of her Moabite ancestry (see Deut. 23:3); and finally, the adulteress Bathsheba, to whom Matthew does not refer to by name, preferring the more striking "wife of Uriah."

What is Matthew trying to tell us? That Jesus came from thoroughly human stock! With incest, prostitution, and adultery in His ancestry and foreign blood coursing through His veins, Jesus came as "God with us," to save us from our sins. Never mind the math. The message is powerful.

Luke 3: Jesus Is One With the Whole Human Race—Attempting to line up Luke's genealogy of Jesus with Matthew's is a frustrating task. For the period after the monarchy, not only does Matthew list 13 names to Luke's 23, but the lists share only two names: Shealtiel and Zerubbabel. Some have suggested that Matthew traces *Joseph's* line; whereas Luke gives us *Mary's*. That is, however, only an educated guess. But the really significant contrast between the two lists is that Matthew produces a *Jewish* lineage, linking Jesus with Abraham; whereas Luke traces a full *human* lineage, moving all the way back to Adam. Matthew's genealogy was for Jews; Luke's was for the world, telling us that Jesus was "the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God" (Luke 3:38).

To sum up, of the several genealogies in Scripture, only those recorded in Genesis 5 and 11 could possibly be used for purposes of dating. But even

there it appears doubtful whether the evidence supports such a usage. And as we fill in the picture now with some other aspects of the use of genealogies, what may appear to us as carelessness of detail should not be surprising if we remember the various reasons why the inspired writers used genealogies in the first place. *We* might think that genealogies should be precise and complete. But those seem to be *our* worries, not those of the Bible writers. That point becomes even clearer as we turn to some other aspects of the genealogical lists in Scripture.

2. Genealogies often provide a line of descent or a line of authority, not a direct list of father-son relationships. Though not from a genealogical list, one of the most obvious uses of the phrase "son of" to jump over hundreds of years in time is the popular title for Jesus, "Son of David," (see, for example, Matt. 9:27).

That same usage appears in the genealogies in which "son of" or "father of" can refer simply to lineage, not next of kin. Judged by ancient rules, then, we have no right to criticize either Moses or Matthew for leaving names out.

Another intriguing example is that of Belshazzar, king of Babylon (Dan. 5). In the early days of the so-called higher criticism of Scripture, critics loved to cite Belshazzar as proof that the author of Daniel did not know his history. They took Belshazzar to be an imaginary character invented by Daniel, since a king by that name was unknown in the official court records of Babylon. Nabonidus consistently appeared as the last king of Babylon. The archaeologists changed all that. Raymond Dougherty published the definitive work *Nabonidus and Belshazzar* in 1929, demonstrating on the basis of new discoveries that Belshazzar was indeed king and the son of Nabonidus.

The text of Daniel 5:2, however, refers to Nebuchadnezzar, not Nabonidus, as Belshazzar's father. Was Daniel right? Dougherty suggested that Belshazzar's mother may have been the daughter of the great king, making Belshazzar Nebuchadnezzar's grandson. (See article, "Belshazzar," in *SDABD*.)

But "son of" and "father of" had an even broader usage in ancient times, referring to a line of authority, not necessarily a bloodline. The most notable example of that happening in biblical times involved Jehu, king of Israel, who was known in Assyrian records as "Jehu, *son of Omri*." Both Jehu and Omri were kings of Israel, but there was no blood tie between them. Omri had established his reputation so firmly that for 150 years after his death, the Assyrians continued to refer to Israel as the

"house of Omri." So even though Jehu actually had wiped out the family of Omri, usurping the throne for the purpose of setting up his own dynasty, the Assyrians still referred to him as "son of Omri." Applied in our day, that would mean that any president of the United States could be described as "son of George Washington."

3. Genealogies rather than historical records may have provided the source for certain problematic numbers in Scripture—In some cases an author or a scribe may have wanted to indicate a time period but only had access to a genealogical list. One could arrive at a time period by taking the number of names on a list and multiplying it by *an average number of years per* generation. Two possible examples come to mind, Genesis 15:13-16 (four generations times 100 years per generation yields 400 years) and 1 Kings 6:1 (12 generations times 40 years per generation yields 480 years), both of which are connected with attempts to date the Exodus from Egypt. We will discuss both texts in that connection.

Dating: The Problem of the Exodus

Among biblical scholars, two proposed dates for the Exodus have been the primary focus of attention: 1445 B.C. and 1290 B.C. Originally, the 1290 date was proposed by liberals; conservatives held to 1445. But times have changed. Now supporters of either date can be found among conservatives (even some supporters of inerrancy claim the 1290 date), whereas the more radical liberals come close to denying the Exodus altogether. (See Appendix F.)

The problems connected with numbers and genealogies, as discussed thus far, do have some bearing on the date of the Exodus. Although definitive answers will elude us, it is interesting to ponder how many generations would elapse before a certain population level could be attained. To be more specific with reference to the Exodus, the questions are: (1) How long was Israel in Egypt? and (2) How large a group left Egypt?

As the key texts indicate, three different lists provide three different numbers for the generations that Israel spent in Egypt: four between Levi and Moses (1 Chron. 6:1-3); seven between Judah and Bezelel (1 Chron. 2:1-20); and 12 between Joseph (Ephraim) and Joshua (1 Chron. 7:23-27). Moses, Bezelel, and Joshua were all contemporaries.

The text of Genesis 15:13-16 links a period of 400 years with the "fourth generation." Some have suggested that the 400 years was a round number arrived at by multiplying an average length of a generation (taken

to be 100 years) by four, representing the four names in 1 Chronicles 6:1-3—Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses.

Egyptian records include no references to Israel until Merneptah, who ruled Egypt ca.1213-1204 B.C. (dates cited from HBD, p. 627), boasted in his "Israel Stele" of a foray into Canaan, where he had obliterated Israel, leaving no survivors. Virtually all scholars agree that Israel was in Canaan by 1200 B.C. But the date for their original arrival in Egypt and the length of their stay there are both problematic.

One key biblical passage, Exodus 12:40, seems to resolve the issue of how long Israel was in Egypt: "The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years." That translation is based on the Hebrew text. Both the LXX and the Samaritan Pentateuch, however, add the phrase "in Canaan," suggesting that the 430 years began from the time of Abraham's call. Adding up the ages of the patriarchs as given in Genesis yields a period of 215 years between the call and Jacob's arrival in Egypt (see Gen. 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9). If one subtracts this 215 years from the 430, the time spent in Egypt would be only 215 years. The textual issue is complicated, however, because the extra qualifying phrase "in Canaan" does not appear in the same place in the LXX and Samaritan texts, suggesting that the addition was not original, but was added by scribes who were attempting to resolve the problem in their own way.

One can try to let another inspired writer resolve the issue, namely, Paul. Referring to Exodus 12:40 for quite another purpose in Galatians 3:17, he adopts the LXX reading, thus supporting the shorter stay in Egypt. But as I have argued in Chapter 18, it is inappropriate to ask inspired writers to resolve this kind of problem. I believe Paul cites the figure from the LXX in the same way that Ellen White cites the figure of 2 million Israelites at the time of the Exodus. Paul simply took for granted what he found in the LXX without asking the question whether the information was right or wrong.

Also belonging to a discussion of the date for the Exodus is 1 Kings 6:1. Actually, this passage might be more helpful in addressing the time of the Exodus if it did not happen to be the other example in which genealogies rather than historical records *may* have been the source for the time period cited. In our English Bibles (based on the Hebrew text) the verse reads as follows: "In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord."

Because biblical events are not mentioned directly in nonbiblical sources before the period of the monarchy, external sources provide little help in dating the early events in Israel's history. With the monarchy, however, points of contact do appear, though recent scholarship is still reluctant to commit itself to firm dates. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, for example, states: "The most we can say with any degree of certainty is that Saul, David, and Solomon lived sometime around 1000" (HBD, p. 166).

But even with that general statement, one would think that a text such as 1 Kings 6:1 could be tied to the building of Solomon's Temple. Working back 480 years from that point would bring us to the date for the Exodus. Adventists have long preferred the 1445 date for the Exodus, based, in part, on the witness of 1 Kings 6:1.

But times have changed in the world of biblical scholarship. While 1445 still has strong advocates, now even some scholars holding to inerrancy support the 1290 date. The issue between liberals and conservatives is no longer which date, but whether there was an Exodus of miraculous proportions at all!

One of the key obstacles that kept "Bible-believing" Christians from supporting the 1290 date was 1 Kings 6:1. But somewhere along the line the argument became believable that the author of 1 Kings 6:1 did not have historical information in front of him, but rather a genealogy with 12 names: 12 times 40 (an average generation) yields 480. Supporting this interpretation is the evidence from the LXX manuscripts for 1 Kings 6:1, which give the figure of 440 years, possibly on the basis of another genealogy covering the same time period, but with 11 names: 11 times 40 yields 440.

What about the period of the judges? Can that help us with chronology? A careful study of the book suggests that many of the judges ruled simultaneously in different parts of the land. If one simply adds up the years for the judges consecutively (410 years in Judges 3-16) and incorporates that figure into reckoning the time between the Exodus and the building of the Temple, the total comes to 554 years, a figure much too high for 1 Kings 6:1. And several uncertainties remain unresolved.

To sum up, we may sketch three possible solutions, all of which find supporters from "Bible-believing" Christians, many of whom hold to inerrancy. All three of the views take a date close to 966 B.C. as the year in which the Temple was built. In working with the material, we find that it is not easy to keep the figures straight, since 1 Kings 6:1 speaks of 480

years *after* the Exodus, whereas Exodus 12:40 speaks of 430 years *before* the Exodus.

Plan 1

Based on Exodus 12:40 (Hebrew) and a literal reading of 1 Kings 6:1:

A. Abraham's call: 2090 (215 years in Canaan)
B. Jacob to Egypt: 1875 (430 years in Egypt)
C. Exodus: 1445 (480 years from Exodus to Temple)
D. Temple built: 966

Plan 2

Based on Exodus 12:40 (Hebrew) and viewing 1 Kings 6:1 as an estimate based on a genealogical list:

A. Abraham's call: 1935 (215 years in Canaan)
B. Jacob to Egypt: 1720 (430 years in Egypt)
C. Exodus: 1290 (325 years from Exodus to Temple)
D. Temple built: 966

Plan 3

Based on LXX and SP of Exodus 12:40 (cf. Gal. 3:17) and literal reading of 1 Kings 6:1:

A. Abraham's call: 1875 (215 years in Canaan)
B. Jacob to Egypt: 1660 (215 years in Egypt)
C. Exodus: 1445 (480 years from Exodus to Temple)
D. Temple built: 966

Since all of these plans are now held by devout conservatives (formerly Plan 2 was held only by liberals), it is interesting to observe the most passionate arguments for each. At first glance, Plan 1 would appear to be most conservative, but it runs into difficulty by pushing Abraham's call (2090) too close to Ussher's date for the Flood (2348).

Plan 2 might appear to take the greatest liberties with the biblical text, but does argue for Exodus 12:40 in the Hebrew, which is clearly the best text. It would also allow enough time in Egypt to build up the population.

Plan 3, perhaps the best-known among Adventists, argues on the basis of the poorer text of Exodus 12:40 (LXX and SP), but does gain support from Galatians 3:17. It also takes 1 Kings 6:1 literally.

The changing face of the data provided by archaeology also influences the above positions. I have chosen not to bring those elements into the

discussion, however, since I simply wanted to deal with the ambiguities of the biblical material.

Quite frankly, I can assure you that college students these days are scarcely interested in such details as I have presented here. But if we are not careful, we will take a firmer stand on issues than the evidence from Scripture warrants. I would much prefer that we view the above discussions as interesting but not frightening. And that means even those who don't find the discussion interesting don't need to be frightened.

Perhaps now you sense the truth of our first subheading in this chapter: "Deadly Dull but Dangerous." You didn't need me to tell you that the genealogies were deadly dull. You already knew that. But perhaps if we can sense why they are dangerous, they will become interesting—interesting enough to make us work through the problem until the danger disappears.

Chapter 20, "Two Ways to Die: The Slippery Slope or the Rehoboam Principle," deals more specifically with the practical questions that arise in connection with the kinds of material found in this chapter. Perhaps the most important conclusion we could note here is that we should be cautious about ruling out either the casual or analytical conclusions that come from a reading of Scripture. God is quite capable of using either method to bring children into His kingdom.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How can the church structure a program of Bible study that cultivates an awareness of the problem areas (such as the genealogies) without making them all-encompassing?

2. Should each church member attempt to "budget" some time for analytical Bible study (as opposed to strictly devotional reading of Scripture), or should we expect the church's scholars to do that kind of work for us? How can analytical study best nourish our Christian experience?

3. To what extent can we draw a parallel between our most reliable friends and the reliability of Scripture? Is it possible for a friend to make a mistake and still retain our confidence? At what point and in what degree of seriousness do "mistakes" undermine confidence? If we require absolute perfection of our friends, how many friends will we have? Is it possible to draw a parallel with Scripture?

PART FOUR

Results:

The Christian's Experience and the Life of the Church

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Introduction to Part IV: The Christian's Experience and the Life of the Church

Our final two chapters address practical concerns in the life of the church. The composition of Adventism is changing and becoming increasingly diverse. Keeping the church vibrant, growing, and unified will require careful thought, planning, prayer—and an abundant measure of God's grace.

In light of the evidence presented thus far in this book, several practical questions come to mind. While they are relevant for the entire church, I believe they are particularly so for the future of our young people. In light of our educational responsibility, we must ask the following questions:

1. How do we want our young people to react to this kind of material? Reject Scripture and God because His Word does not match up to their expectations? Pretend they have not seen? Or see and believe—ultimately with greater fervor and without fear?

Everything in my Adventist heritage teaches me that the third option is the only way to go. And I firmly believe it is possible. It is not a question of exalting reason above revelation, but seeking to understand revelation through sanctified reason. And if we decide that we want our young people to see Scripture the way it is and to believe, then two more questions present themselves.

2. When do we want them to see, and under what circumstances? In some cases we may have no choice. But careful planning will certainly help.

3. What practical steps can we take to accomplish our desired goals?

Chapter 20 addresses this cluster of questions. When my students discover certain facts and surprises, admittedly with my help (I wish someone had helped me when I had discovered them!), I remind them of Ellen White's statements: "Everything that is human is imperfect" (1SM, p. 20) and "The Lord gave His Word in just the way He wanted it to come" (1SM, p. 21).

Surely the Lord does not intend to make these issues a test of faith. And surely the important issues in Scripture stand out with painful clarity. And if we are successful in crossing the hurdle of surprise, then the so-called problems can actually be seen as essential adaptations to the needs of human beings as God seeks to communicate with us.

Ultimately, we must allow the important issues in Scripture to tower above all else. And in this connection, I find two Ellen White quotations particularly helpful. One comes from *Testimonies to Ministers* and speaks to the significance of John 3:16. After quoting the verse, Ellen White observes: "This lesson is one of the greatest importance to every soul that lives; for the terms of salvation are here laid out in distinct lines. If one had no other text in the Bible, this alone would be a guide for the soul" (TM, p. 370).

But if that "one verse" is to be effective, the believer must have confidence in God's Word, for John 3:16 has been transmitted to us through His Word. That is why our task is so crucial.

The other quotation comes in the context of the 1888 aftermath. In the preceding paragraph, Ellen White has argued that uniformity in the interpretation of Scripture cannot be the basis of unity. "We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light."

She then summarizes her view of what constitutes the basis of unity in the church, a remarkable commentary on the two great commands: "The great truths of the Word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them. When as individual members of the church, you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, there will be no need of labored efforts to be in unity, for there will be oneness in Christ as a natural result" (MS 24, 1892 [larger excerpt in Appendix G]).

Our final two chapters address the relationship between our confidence in Scripture and our confidence in God. The two go hand in hand, for Scripture is the source of our knowledge about God.

CHAPTER
TWENTY

Two Ways to Die: The Slippery Slope or the Rehoboam Principle

When pastors look over the congregation and when teachers look over the class, they know that the group can be divided into two risk categories: those who can be lost because of the "slippery slope" and those who can be lost through the functioning of the "Rehoboam principle."

We have hammered away at the slippery slope with considerable tenacity. But we have not addressed the Rehoboam principle, though its long shadow certainly stands over this entire book. The label comes from the story of Israel's rebellion against Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). When the people asked for reduced taxes, a concession on Rehoboam's part would have secured the kingdom. But no, he not only held to the status quo; he threatened to increase the burden.

"To your tents, O Israel!" the people responded with anguish, and the kingdom was lost.

Ellen White's observation is cogent: "In the hour of opportunity that came to them during the meeting in Shechem, *they failed to reason from cause to effect, and thus forever weakened their influence over a large number of the people*" (PK, p. 90, italics mine).

With reference to inspiration, those who fear the slippery slope (for example, Rehoboam!) argue for no concessions at all. Indeed, they would tighten the noose of inerrancy, often with creedal statements and the demand for signed confessions. But throughout this book I have based my arguments on the assumption that we ought to be willing to let Scripture tell us about itself.

I would also argue against importing alien rationalistic norms to apply

to Scripture. When the text speaks of a miracle, let us accept the witness of the text. By the same token, when the text reveals differences (for instance, in parallel passages), let us accept that witness, too. To insist that we not see what we have already seen must lead to the cry "To your tents, O Israel."

The church has lost thoughtful and committed people because certain fellow believers imposed a view on Scripture that did not match up with the facts. To claim *too much* for Scripture is as deadly as *not claiming enough*. Every teacher, every pastor, has to face that dilemma. Shall we lose some because we claim too much for Scripture? Or shall we lose others because they fear that we are not claiming enough?

In this chapter I want to explore some practical suggestions for cutting the losses from both groups and for dealing with inspiration in a practical way in the life of the church. I will address five larger principles first, then eight more specific applications will follow.

Larger Issues Facing the Church

1. *Slippery Slope Versus the Rehoboam Principle*—The issue here is not unlike the tension between Calvinists and Arminians. Will faith collapse suddenly or erode gradually? Those who fear the slippery slope say, in effect, "If I have to start down that road, I'll simply toss it in right now. Admit one 'error' and the whole thing becomes worthless." Some will stonewall to the end and resist collapse; others will indeed jettison their faith because they have seen the one deadly flaw.

Meanwhile, many of the people have come to negotiate with Rehoboam. "We will serve you faithfully if you will ease up just a bit. Please let us go as far as the Bible itself goes." If the church responds as Rehoboam did, it will lose those who have already seen. And *there* is our dilemma. Now, I believe that we can take practical steps to reduce the losses from both groups. We take up those points later. Let us keep in mind, however, that both dangers are very real.

I remember talking to an older student, formerly a Roman Catholic, who described his reaction to the change in dogma that allowed Catholics to eat meat on Friday. The student was around 10 years old at the time and only nominally linked with the church. But when the decision came, he was appalled, and so he rejected all religion. "We had been taught that you go to hell for eating meat on Friday," he said. "Now what do we tell all those guys in hell?" By the time he talked with me, he had found faith again. But he still remembered the shock.

W. W. Prescott faced the slippery slope when asked to edit *The Great Controversy*. He worked it through to a stronger faith. But his initial response was less than positive. "At first I said, 'No, I will not do it. I know what it means.' But I was urged into it. When I had gone over it with W. C. White, then I said, 'Here is my difficulty. I have gone over this and suggested changes that ought to be made in order to correct statements. These changes have been accepted. My personal difficulty will be to retain faith on those things that I cannot deal with on that basis.' But I did not throw up the Spirit of Prophecy, and have not yet; but I have had to adjust my view of things. I will say to you, as a matter of fact, that the relation of those writings to this movement and to our work is clearer and more consistent in my mind than it was then. But still you know what I am charged with. I have gone through the personal experience myself over that very thing that you speak of. If we correct it here and correct it there, how are we going to stand with it in other places?" (Couperus, pp. 54, 55).

I have seen students work through to a firmer faith. If that were not the experience of the overwhelming majority, I would not have written this book. On the other hand, I have seen the faith of a few collapse. I have seen students begin to make the change, then move away from their social support and so lose their faith later. In Adventism, A. T. Jones, D. M. Canright, and John Harvey Kellogg were all leaders who could not make the change. Prescott said, "I have had to adjust my view of things." That is the adjustment needed for the entire church if we wish to avoid recurring crises over the issue of inspiration.

To refer to the homely (and chauvinistic!) illustration I mentioned before, some are saying "Out!" because the beans are burned. Others are insisting "The beans are not burned; they just have a unique and special flavor." The mature position is "The value of my wife is not determined by the occasional burned beans; in the things that really matter she is just what I need. And even then she burns the beans only on rare occasions."

I believe we can find that more mature position—the middle road—and make it safe, if we recognize the importance of the next major principle, that of social support.

2. *The Importance of Social Support to Any View of Inspiration*—It is too easy for us to accept our present position as that which is ultimately right. We need to recognize that whatever position we adopt, regardless of its ultimate validity, it draws its support from a social environment. If I adopt a more concrete approach to eternal matters, a group of believers holding similar views will enable me to keep on believing. The same is true

of someone who holds to a more abstract perspective.

"Conversions" to a new life and a new way of thinking are more likely when one is emerging from a shattered environment and seeks a new social support system. For such a person to buy into a new system, the new position needs to be clear and the supporters confident. Evangelism is hardly successful when the pastor or the members are not sure of their beliefs. Ringing affirmation, even of something that is quite false, will gain more adherents than waffling does—even if the waffling is dealing with matters that are true.

I have indicated that Ellen White has provided social support for me. Also, my college teacher J. Paul Grove played an instrumental role in the early stages of my intellectual development. Because of my own personal experience in these matters, I truly believe that we can shape a middle road as a community, putting the limits where they need to be (so we don't slide down the slippery slope). We can—and should—make the concessions that the text of Scripture demands (to keep Rehoboam's subjects happy) and then move out with confidence. We will not only provide a stable community for ourselves and our children, but we could become a powerful influence for stability in the larger Christian world.

Sociologist-theologian Peter Berger candidly reveals the importance of social support when he comments on the theological movement of neoorthodoxy. (While Adventists would not feel comfortable with many of the tenets of neoorthodoxy, the movement did represent a significant attempt to recover a sense of God's transcendence.) Since neoorthodoxy moved against the grain of contemporary culture, its adherents needed to support each other. "Put crudely, if one is to believe what neoorthodoxy wants one to believe, in the contemporary situation, then one must be rather careful to huddle together closely and continuously with one's fellow believers" (Berger, p. 164).

Berger's way may seem crude, but the book of Hebrews tells us the same thing in more familiar language: "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . ." (Heb. 10:25, KJV).

When my wife and I lived in Germany, I sensed myself moving toward the abstract end of the spectrum for no other reason than the influence of my environment. Because my concrete existence is so important to me—and it grows out of an appreciation of the doctrine of Creation—I intend to seek social support for those key elements affirmed in Scripture. That is what the Adventist Church is all about.

3. *The Law Pyramid as the Basis of Stability*—I am increasingly

impressed that the one, the two, and the ten laws provide a remarkably consistent framework within which all of Scripture makes very good sense. Those who fear the slippery slope can find a solid anchor in that perspective on law. Because Adventists take the Sabbath seriously, our view of law makes a unique Adventist contribution in the world. I believe we ought to take hold of this gift of God and share it with the world.

4. *Relationship Versus Encyclopedia*—The tendency to take documents written by inspired writers as offering the final word on all matters is a deeply rooted one in conservative Christian circles. I believe that one of the reasons for the significant loss of faith in Scripture in the nineteenth century was the inability of the church to find a middle road. Scholars began to discover things in Scripture that the church did not want to recognize. The Rehoboam principle went into effect. As a result, there has been a significant loss to the ranks of believers.

In some ways we have made ourselves virtual prisoners of the Enlightenment. While disenchanted scholars may attempt to disprove the Bible, we should not come onto their ground and attempt to use the same methods to prove the divine origin of Scripture. The really important things in my religious experience, and indeed in my human experience, cannot be proven in the formal sense.

What kind of evidence, for example, would actually prove that my wife loves me? Even attempting to assemble that kind of evidence would destroy the very thing I value most: her trust and our relationship, which is based on mutual trust.

If we have a fairly good feel for what constitutes reliability in our friends and in those whom we love, why not try a similar approach to Scripture? We trust the witnesses who have delivered Scripture to us. We expect them to be practical but not perfect in any final sense. That means we can pick up Scripture, read it, ponder it, enjoy it, even puzzle over it, and all without fearing what we might find when we turn the page.

That makes Scripture very much like a letter from family or friends. And that is a model I find especailly helpful. Every time we have lived overseas, even for just a few months, we rediscover our love of mail. In Britain, where the letter slot typically is right in the front door, we tuned our ears to the tantalyzing sound of mail clattering through the slot and onto the floor. It is a beautiful noise, even if the news is sometimes somber. Eagerly we tear open the envelope and read. And we don't worry much about mistakes. Can't we do the same for Scripture?

5. *The Role of Adventism in the Larger Christian World*—I believe

the time is right for Adventists to make a contribution to the larger Christian world and to do so unashamedly as Adventists. Inspiration and biblical law are two areas in which we have something to say. Among ourselves, of course, we can recognize Ellen White's role as catalyst. In the larger scene, however, we will appeal only to Scripture. And it can be done quite tidily. Scripture is actually remarkably clear. We simply need to have the right kind of community giving us social support to say what we have suspected to be true all along.

Conservative evangelical Christians, returning to an active dialogue with the intellectual world after the negative fallout from the Fundamentalist debate in the early years of this century, have not always been careful in their scholarship. In philology, archaeology, and textual criticism, some premier work has been accomplished. As we seek to contribute now to the more volatile areas of biblical studies and systematic theology, it is important that we do our homework carefully.

In Chapter 19 I referred to the careless handling of the argument dealing with the Hebrew word for "thousand" in Harold Lindsell's book *The Battle for the Bible*. Another even more striking instance of carelessness (at least from an Adventist perspective) is the entry on Ellen White in the first edition of the *New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (1974). After listing Ellen White's death date as 1915, the article concludes with this unsettling observation: "She wrote several volumes dealing with Adventist doctrines, notably, *In Defense of the Faith* (1933)." How Ellen White could author a book 18 years after her death the article does not explain! What most likely happened, however, was that the editors/authors had relied on secondary sources. The title and date refer to W. H. Branson's official response to D. M. Canright's *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced*. The NIDCC retains Canright's spelling for the church, another clue that secondary sources were involved. Intended to be a serious evangelical counterpart to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* the NIDCC does contain some very helpful material. And fortunately, the problems noted above were put right in the second edition.

We must do our homework carefully in the primary sources. For biblical studies, that means in the text of Scripture itself. We will not develop a reputation for sound scholarship if we continue to rely on arguments for inspiration that do not deal with the evidence in the text itself. The task of convincing the modern world that there is a Creator and Redeemer who intervenes in the lives of human beings is daunting

enough. Why should we complicate that task by employing arguments about Scripture that are not wholly sound? It is one thing to profess ignorance or awe about unseen matters. But when the parallel passages in Scripture prove traditional arguments to be untenable, we should "adjust our view of things," to borrow a phrase from an Adventist who did just that, W. W. Prescott.

Practical Suggestions: Dealing With Inspiration in the Church

The following suggestions draw together a number of conclusions and inferences that have been developed in the course of the book. They are oriented to the practical task of educating the church while being honest with the text of Scripture.

1. Use internal evidence from Scripture. In some cases external evidence is helpful for understanding the biblical account. But appeals to science over against Scripture do not help when they simply pit the natural against the supernatural. When a particular idea is based on an *interpretation of* Scripture, such as biblical chronology, one must reconsider Scripture. In general, the church will not respond positively to arguments or evidence from nonbiblical sources. Our primary task is to deal with the evidence from Scripture itself.

The parallel passages in Scripture are by far the most significant ones for developing an adequate view of inspiration. The Gospels or Samuel-Kings/Chronicles make excellent study documents for educational purposes.

2. Allow for both the casual and the analytical reader. We have seen at least two examples in which the casual reader of Scripture is likely to form conclusions that differ from those made by the analytical reader: (a) biblical chronology and (b) the number of people involved in the Exodus from Egypt (2 million). A third example might be the extent of Noah's flood. Certainly Adventists, along with other conservative Christians, have argued for a universal Flood. That has changed dramatically in recent years, however, as evangelicals, even those holding to inerrancy, now would make room for a miraculous but less than universal event.

Colossians 1:23 could point in that direction. There, Paul argues that the gospel "has been preached to every creature under heaven." We would not take Paul's reference to mean worldwide as we know it today.

The important thing in all these examples, however, is that we not revert to a merely natural event. Both the casual and the analytical reader must admit that the text claims supernatural intervention. There is a

world of difference between leaving the basic fact in place while differing over various aspects of it and denying the fact altogether.

In other words, we would want to say that the *fact* of the Flood is more important than its extent. Similarly, we would argue that the fact of the Exodus is more important than the number of people involved, though in each case preserving the miraculous element. And in each case we should allow the casual reader to be at peace in the church as well as the analytical reader.

To arrive at that point, we must agree on what is essential and on what might be debatable. Given the nature of the church, the greater burden for caution must rest with the more sophisticated thought leaders.

3. The best defense is a good offense. Neither Ellen White nor the Bible writers emphasize the fact that they are laying aside the old and picking up something new. New Testament attitudes toward Jewish customs come as close as anything to direct polemic against that which is no longer valid. Jesus' statements in the Sermon on the Mount ("You have heard that it was said. . . . But I say to you . . .") offer another example in which a transition is being made. When Peter refers to the burden "which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" (Acts 15:10), he reveals more than is typical for an inspired writer.

In general, however, the old simply fades away, and the new slips into place. In the writings of Ellen White, for example, she incorporates significant modifications in her writings, but almost never calls direct attention to them. There are very real and practical reasons for that approach. The one disadvantage, of course, is that disenchanted readers may claim cover-up. But for the same reason that I would not load down a popular lecture with copious oral footnotes, I would risk the cover-up charge. It would be helpful, however, to involve the church in occasional seminars in which the more mechanical and human aspects are presented and discussed in a helpful way. But that should not be an overriding concern. Food for the soul must be foremost. That means not showing too much of the skeleton that carries the flesh.

4. Allow storytellers the freedom they need. A study of the parallel accounts in Scripture, especially the Gospels, reveals that the writers exercised remarkable freedom in adapting the story to their teaching needs. All great storytellers do the same. I still remember my disappointment when I learned that one of my childhood favorites *Secret of the Cave* by Arthur Maxwell (Uncle Arthur) didn't really happen that way. It's a great story—but now I know it is a collage of stories developed into one.

We find something like that in the Sermon on the Mount, a compilation that is presented as a sermon. Luke takes some of the same material and recasts it as the Sermon on the Plain. But don't take my word for it. Study the accounts for yourself. Many will still want to postulate separate events for each different story. Such an approach faces monumental difficulties in my view, and it is only taken because of an inerrancy presupposition, not because that is the obvious meaning of the text.

If we recognize that the Bible was given for practical purposes, let's grant the writers the same privileges we grant pastors, teachers, and storytellers, namely, the freedom to shape and mold the account for purposes of teaching the right lesson.

5. Watch your language. There are at least three specific concerns under this general heading:

A. Get your sea legs first before you attempt anything rash. Until you have made peace with the material yourself, you will not be in a position to share it. And the way you share it will depend on your own particular experience and style. I tend to be very open and candid, especially when dealing with Ellen White, because she has played such a key role in my spiritual formation. Colleagues tell me that they could never say the things I say and get away with it. I hope my listeners sense that I am not trying to get away with anything, but simply seeking to share an experience that has become very important to me. And it is one worth sharing.

B. Avoid phrases that reinforce misleading concepts. The all-or-nothing statements are the most deadly: "If you use any translation other than the KJV . . ." Or "If you find so much as one error in the Bible . . ." We are paying a dear price for the repetition of those phrases in the past. We remember and we remember and we remember—even when we have decided to forget. Perhaps a more telling way to translate Proverbs 22:6 would be: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he won't be able to get away from it."

Also under this heading we could note that avoiding the reinforcement of conclusions from casual reading would be advisable. Instead of talking about 2 million people coming out of Egypt, we could easily say "thousands." We will still need to live with the conclusions of casual readers. But we do not need to encourage them to take their casual conclusions so seriously.

C. Avoid inflammatory words. Such words as "error," "contradiction," and "mistake" should virtually be deleted from our vocabulary when we talk about the Bible. In America there is such a strong undercurrent of

belief in inerrancy, even among those who have never read the Bible, that we could easily lose them before we reach them if we are not careful with our words. The word "difference" will go a long way toward describing whatever needs to be described. "Shaping" or "molding" are also better words than "changing." Our goal is to build faith.

6. Read. The classic statements on inspiration for Adventists are found in the Introduction to *The Great Controversy* and in *Selected Messages*, book 1, the documents included as Part I of this book. Avoid theoretical discussions that do not deal with the evidence from Scripture. There is nothing like reading Scripture itself. The parallel passages are very useful in establishing the boundaries of any inspiration theory. We should be willing to go at least as far as the Bible itself goes.

And of course, I would hope that this book would help as a guide and as a spur to further study and discussion. But don't just take my word for it. Try it out. I still like the rather tart statement from the pen of Ellen White, coming in the post-1888 era: "We are not to accept the opinion of commentators as the voice of God; they were erring mortals like ourselves. God has given reasoning powers to us as well as to them. We should make the Bible its own expositor" (TM, p. 106).

7. Work with church leaders. In the North Pacific Union we owe a real debt of gratitude to Richard Fearing, union president at the time of Consultation II. At the consultation itself the suggestion was made that church leaders and scholars should come together to work on the issue of inspiration and related matters.

Elder Fearing took that counsel seriously and scheduled a three-day session for union and conference officers to meet with the religion faculty from Walla Walla College. We simply worked through basic texts in small groups, spending the first day on the Old Testament, the second day on the New Testament, and the third day on the writings of Ellen White. We were in a retreat setting, and the experience was intense but extremely valuable. The surprises were many, but because they came in an affirming environment, we were able to grow together.

That is precisely the kind of activity that Ellen White describes in *Counsels to Parents and Teachers*: "It would greatly benefit our schools if regular meetings were held frequently in which all the teachers could unite in the study of the Word of God" (CT, p. 433). The ideal dynamic that she describes happening is very close to what we experienced in Camp MiVoden as we came together around the Word of God.

Pastors, teachers, administrators, evangelists, laity—we all have our

own perspectives, determined in part by our role in life and in the church. If we do not come together on a regular basis, it is very easy for suspicions to develop. Then we begin throwing stones, and the body of Christ is wounded. We can do better than that. I have seen it happen in our part of the world. And I am most grateful to our union administrators for nudging us in the way we should go.

8. Do not use the writings of Ellen White as a final interpreter of the Bible any more than you would use the New Testament as a final interpreter of the Old Testament. This last point is perhaps the most volatile. During my college years, J. Paul Grove taught me to read Matthew for what Matthew was saying. We did not read other Gospels. We did not read commentators. We did not read *The Desire of Ages*. Elder Grove wanted us to hear Matthew. And we did.

But then I discovered that Matthew did not follow the same rules that I followed. And I was angry—for a while. I would have flunked if I had read the Old Testament the way Matthew did. But then I worked it through and discovered that Matthew was using the best methods of his day. So I forgave him.

Ultimately, I had to work through the issue of how I related the writings of one inspired writer to another. My motto now is (and it is terribly important, I believe, if we wish to retain our own integrity and that of the inspired writers): **If you want to know what the Old Testament means, read the Old Testament; if you want to know what the New Testament means, read the New Testament; if you want to know what Ellen White means, read Ellen White.**

That's not to say that any inspired writer cannot drop a hint or a suggestion that will open up great windows of light on another passage. Ellen White opened up the Old Testament for me. She gave me permission to see things that I had been told were dangerous to see. And now she will often yield an insight that helps me understand Scripture, just as the study of Scripture often yields insights that help me understand Ellen White.

Underlying this approach is the assumption, of course, that the canon of Scripture is secure. In addition, I take Ellen White as a credentialed prophet, if you please, speaking to the Adventist community. She has earned her spurs. I no longer have to put her to the test any more than I would put Jeremiah or Matthew or Paul to the test.

In a sense, it is like marriage. I no longer have to ask whether or not I am married. I don't even have to feel married. I am married. And that

gives me a great deal of security and freedom when my wife and I are together and when we are apart.

Ellen White, as well as the Bible writers, wrote for "practical purposes." That means we ought to pay attention to the major teachings and the primary thrust of what she is saying in any given context.

I am not comfortable in saying that she is "pastoral" in an attempt to distinguish her role from that of the biblical prophets. Inspiration as a phenomenon is the same in the experience of the Bible writers as it is in the experience of Ellen White.

However, the *role* of Scripture is different. It is the norm by which all else is judged. But because I never take an inspired writer to be a final interpreter of a passage written by another inspired writer, I never have to play one off against the other. In every case I look for the application and the primary thrust of the message. And by all means, we should begin weaning ourselves away from the habit of using Ellen White or Scripture as a kind of Holy Spirit edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* that gives us authoritative information on minor details.

"The Bible was given for practical purposes" (1 SM, p. 20). It is our link with God. And by God's grace we will cherish it until He returns.

At the risk of multiplying words, I would like to close this chapter with one of my favorite quotations from the book *Education*. It speaks to the issue of the power of the Word of God: "As we contemplate the great things of God's Word, we look into a fountain that broadens and deepens beneath our gaze. Its breadth and depth pass our knowledge. As we gaze, the vision widens; stretched out before us we behold a boundless, shoreless sea. Such study has vivifying power. The mind and heart acquire new strength, new life. This experience is the highest evidence of the divine authorship of the Bible. We receive God's word as food for the soul, through the same evidence by which we receive bread as food for the body. Bread supplies the need of our nature; we know by experience that it produces blood and bone and brain. Apply the same test to the Bible: when its principles have actually become the elements of character, what has been the result? what changes have been made in the life?—'Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' (2 Cor. 5:17)" (Ed, pp. 171, 172).

CHAPTER
TWENTY-ONE

It's All So Very Plain

In this concluding chapter we return to our starting point, and take another look at the interplay between Christian experience and sacred text.

The year was 1982. I was teaching a new upper-division college course, Inspiration/Revelation. Over a period of 10 weeks we would spend forty 50-minute sessions together. Since events in Adventism had thrust the topic into the limelight, our work was cut out for us.

My own goals for the class were clear: I wanted my students to learn to read their Bibles reverently but without fear. And I wanted them to appreciate the ministry of Ellen White. To that end we would empty the skeletons from the closet one by one and explore ways of turning potential stumbling blocks into stepping stones.

We would study Ellen White's experience and writings, but our first interest would be Scripture. The menu would be varied: prophetic experiences, proverbs, prayers, parallel passages, to mention some of the appetizers; the entree (that is, the tougher problems) would come toward the end of the term: the use of the Old Testament in the New, the distinction between what is literal and symbolic in visions, and the analysis of enduring elements in eschatological passages. Finally, a choice morsel for dessert: Ellen White's classic statements on inspiration from *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 15-58, and the Introduction to *The Great Controversy*, pages v-xii.

For some time I had been experimenting with assignments that would expose students to Scripture and encourage them to arrive at their own

thoughtful conclusions, allowing me to monitor their spiritual pulse at the same time.

Thus a typical assignment simply required the students to react to reading material in a meaningful way. Any thoughtful response submitted on time received full credit. Tests were graded rigorously, but the assignments enabled the students to respond freely without risking their grade. This approach encouraged them to stay current with their reading, and it allowed me to keep in touch with their thinking.

For the "Inspiration/Revelation" course, my choice of dessert (the Ellen White statements) was deliberate. After the students had worked their way through some 20 assignments and had grappled with various problems, I wanted them to experience the remarkable blending of realism and reassurance that these statements offer. Pedagogically, the plan seemed sound; answers always make more sense after you know the questions. But I was in for a jolt.

The class was a delight to teach. A sprinkling of new Christians injected a certain simplicity and vibrancy into our discussions, a helpful counterbalance to the probing questions of the more skeptically inclined. Often when students were surprised at their discoveries in Scripture, I referred to Ellen White's statements, pointing out how this godly woman was able to put the surprises in their place—and still believe. But through the term, these references were always secondhand. Even my most glowing recommendations failed to move these typical American college students to read the relevant passages before they absolutely had to. That turned out to be crucial.

During that term our School of Theology staff was also dealing with the inspiration issue in several local churches in our union. In those areas in which members had left to join independent "Adventist" fellowships, inspiration had been a key issue.

As I took my turn at these off-campus appointments, I was impressed with the urgency of our task at the college. The churches were torn and bleeding; loved ones and friends had been wrenched apart; anger, hostility, fear, and sorrow were very much in evidence. To what extent were we at the college to blame for failing to educate the church? It was a gnawing and persistent question.

When away from campus we generally packed the Sabbath hours full of formal meetings and question-and-answer sessions. And the members were eager to meet informally on Saturday night as well. Again and again we worked over the questions of "Why?" and "Where do we go from here?"

The members weren't shy about expressing themselves. One brother declared. "If you had told me those things eight years ago, I would have tossed you right out of the church." That, of course, made it easier to explain the reputed "cover-up." A pastor or teacher wants to share material in a way that will help the members grow. But if they aren't ready, what should teachers or pastors do?

As the academic term was drawing to a close, I made a final weekend trip to one of the troubled churches. It was a good visit. And as I retired late Saturday evening at the home of a church family, I fell asleep with an oft-repeated line ringing in my ears: "If only we could have had meetings like these six months ago, we might have saved our church family."

Sunday morning I awoke early. With plenty of time before breakfast and the flight home, I reached for the stack of "Inspiration/Revelation" assignments that I had tucked into my briefcase. Still snuggled comfortably in bed, I began to read. This was the assignment dealing with eschatological passages, the last "tough" one of the term. The students were to compare some Old Testament eschatological passages, Isaiah 65, 66 and Zechariah 14, with a New Testament passage, Revelation 21, 22, and comment on how one determines which elements from the Old Testament have permanent value.

The first few responses were unexceptional. But suddenly I was wide awake, jarred by the following response: "In Zechariah it seems like the day of the Lord is an establishing of an earthly kingdom, not a heavenly one, and it also seems like the people of that time looked for its soon fulfillment in their day. The question I have is: Why have Adventists taken some texts and left others to suit their own interpretation? It is the same in Isaiah too. Can you be justified in taking some and leaving the rest? How do you really tell if there is a permanent or lasting value in them? I'm really mixed up, and my faith in Adventism dwindles a bit here, because it seems we have misused the Scriptures or have greatly misunderstood them and used them in the wrong way. So many things have been uprooted that I need some stable evidence that I can trust. What do we have to stand on?"

Then came a break in the handwritten copy; a question mark and a single word cried out from the middle of the page:

HELP

The text resumed: "If we can't trust in a prophet's words because they

aren't directly word-for-word inspired and we can't tell whether something has lasting value for us today, how do we personally apply the Bible to us if we don't know? Are the promises for others, with no thought of today? Has the Adventist tradition simply pulled texts out of context so that we have a totally made-up theology? Please bring back our confidence or explain why."

Hardly a ringing affirmation of my course objectives! I picked up the next paper. More of the same (the students were roommates): "As I read the passages listed I was almost shocked to find those texts that our church has always believed to be about the kingdom/heaven. . . . Somehow over these past weeks of this quarter, I've come up with the idea that the Holy Bible isn't all that I had it cracked up to be. Ideas have been presented in this class that have made me wonder: Is there any validity in what 'the inspired men of old' have written? And yet this is probably not what I was supposed to learn from this class (hopefully)."

Continuing, the student admitted to being "frightened" at some of her thoughts. "Maybe I'm not the kind who can handle the real truth." But then came a postscript with a ray of hope: "After reading what I had written above, I noticed quite a sharp note to it—maybe too sharp. This class has been a real strength to my overall view of the Bible, helping me to realize that the men of the Scriptures were humans like we are and not so infallible. This may seem a contradiction to what I just wrote above. I guess I'm just a little confused. I have enjoyed this class immensely and would hope that the views stated above would not necessarily reflect any fault on the teacher."

Taking the two assignments to breakfast, I read them to my hosts. The contrast between Saturday night gratitude and Sunday morning panic was almost more than I could handle. We discussed the challenge of educating the church. And we prayed.

How can we build a faith that endures? I knew the two young ladies who had expressed their alarm. They were committed Christians and a positive influence on campus. Why was their house of faith in trouble?

Monday morning the final assignment of the term was due. This was the dessert: "Read the Introduction to *The Great Controversy*, and *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 15-58. Give your personal reaction."

I collected the papers then told them what had happened over the weekend. The discussion that followed was sobering but helpful. After class I headed back to my office, pondering the tantalizing set of papers in my hand.

Joy and relief! The Spirit had been at work. While I was away, the two roommates had read the assignment. With no coaching from me, this is what the first one wrote: "I wish we had read both of these at the beginning. They made it so plain about everything we have studied so far. It was like a compact writing of the whole quarter. Ellen G. White told exactly how to use her writings and the Bible. She made it so plain. I wish that everyone would read it so that there wouldn't be so many problems today about the whole controversy."

And from her roommate: "As I read those books I wondered why they weren't required at the beginning of the quarter. I was very impressed. It answered a lot of my questions about dealing with her writings and the Scriptures. Why has there been so much hassle about her writings when she has the answers right there?"

You probably guessed. My students now read those passages at the beginning of the term *and* at the end. And the second time through, they still see a great deal that they didn't appreciate the first time around.

But why are these statements so powerful? For the two students in my class, Ellen White didn't even address the issues raised by Zechariah 14 and Isaiah 65, 66. Nevertheless, they were reassured. Perhaps doubt gives birth to doubt, and faith multiplies faith. That great Christian apologist C. S. Lewis hinted at our vulnerability in this respect as he reflected on his own experience: "The society of unbelievers makes faith harder, even when they are people whose opinions, on any other subject, are known to be worthless" (Lewis, p. 42).

The company we keep does have a bearing on our spiritual life. And when we read Ellen White's statements on inspiration, we are in the company of a believer. She doesn't actually tell us anything we couldn't discover for ourselves through a careful reading of Scripture. But should we run across an unsettling "surprise" in God's Word, she reassures us, telling us that she has been there too—and that she still believes. In an age of skepticism, we need that kind of help.

This experience has left its mark on me and my teaching; I believe the lessons I learned can benefit the church. Both the happy ending and the pain along the way have something to tell us.

First, the study of the Bible brings joy and light. But it can also be frightening and dangerous. We dare not proceed without imploring God to send His Spirit to guide and bless.

Second, complacency in our study of the Word may mean that we will have to learn our lessons in difficult times, through tears and heartache.

At the peak of the 1888 crisis, Ellen White described the danger in a testimony to the church: "As real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's Word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.

"The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what" (5T, pp. 706, 707).

The third lesson I believe we should learn is the great value of Ellen White's writings on inspiration. God gave her the remarkable ability to be realistic about the humanity of the authors of Scripture while reassuring us of God's presence in His Word. In an age reeking of skepticism, we must treasure this gift from God.

But if Ellen White held such a practical and balanced view of Scripture, why has such a view not been more widely held in the church? Perhaps because the church has not been ready to listen. And if the church is not ready, even if God's messenger speaks, the words will not find their way home.

In God's great providence we can learn from her now. I know that I will be eternally grateful for what she has done for me. At a time when Adventists are struggling to know how to relate to the ministry of Ellen White and seem to be neglecting Scripture at the same time, maybe those of us who have been blessed by her ministry need to be more vocal in giving our testimony.

Initially, I was a bit startled when one of my friends who read this book in manuscript form described it as "an act of gratitude to Ellen White and as a gift of support to others wrestling with questions that arise in our secular and pluralistic culture." The more I think about it, the more I like what he wrote. Indeed, I would be grateful if the church I love could see this book in that light.

Some may be unsettled by the forthrightness of my discussion. And those who may not have been touched by her ministry in the way that I have been touched may be puzzled by the intensity of my convictions. We

are not capable of understanding all the mysteries of why we are able to believe and how. But as I have watched friends and students struggle with issues of faith, I have longed for them to find a meaningful relationship with God. Ours is a cruel and bitter world. Not without reason have Abraham and a host of others looked for "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10).

Are you tired of being alone in the world? "No intangible principle, no impersonal essence or mere abstraction, can satisfy the needs and longings of human beings in this life of struggle with sin and sorrow and pain. It is not enough to believe in law and force, in things that have no pity, and never hear the cry for help. We need to know of an almighty arm that will hold us up, of an infinite Friend that pities us. We need to clasp a hand that is warm, to trust in a heart full of tenderness. And even so God has in His Word revealed Himself" (Ed, p. 133).

Do you need strength to keep on keeping on? "As the student of the Bible beholds the Redeemer, there is awakened in the soul the mysterious power of faith, adoration, and love. Upon the vision of Christ the gaze is fixed, and the beholder grows into the likeness of that which he adores. The words of the apostle Paul become the language of the soul: 'I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; . . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.' (Phil. 3:8-10)" (Ed, p. 192).

Finally, my prayer is that Ellen White's model for studying Scripture could become ours. The goal is a daunting one, but it is one worth praying for. And when it happens, we give each other wisdom and strength as He designed that we should: "It would greatly benefit our schools if regular meetings were held frequently in which all the teachers could unite in the study of the Word of God. They should search the Scriptures as did the noble Bereans. They should subordinate all preconceived opinions, and taking the Bible as their lesson book, comparing scripture with scripture, they should learn what to teach their students, and how to train them for acceptable service" (CT, p. 433).

I like that picture. It is a marvelous model for a community of believers who plan to spend eternity together. Scripture, in all its richness and diversity, is God's means for binding our hearts together in a mysterious union with Him and with each other. Let's pray that He will make it happen.

SUMMARY

A Practical Approach: Key Features and Primary Benefits

INTRODUCTION: SHIFTING THE FOCUS FROM THE THEORETICAL TO THE PRACTICAL: Ever since Enlightenment critics denied the divine origin of the Bible, the battle over Scripture has been waged largely on Enlightenment turf, with questions and answers being set within the theoretical realm of philosophy and science. While devout believers have sought to defend Scripture, increasingly they have relied on Enlightenment tools to do so, not only citing proofs from science and archaeology, but even resorting to probability statistics in defense of prophecy. As a result, the experiential elements in Scripture have been neglected in favor of the cold rationality of logical and scientific proofs. The Bible has not been able to speak its own message.

Careful attention to Scripture's own voice, however, shifts the focus to the more practical realm of relationship and Christian experience. Thus the perfection of Scripture is less like that of the precision laboratory and more like that of a windswept athletic field where people grapple with the elements and with other people in pursuit of a clear-cut goal. Recognizing that Scripture is designed to meet the needs of people explains many seemingly contradictory elements and serves to transform problems into solutions. The following summary brings together the key elements that characterize the "practical" approach developed in this book.

1. THE FAMILY LETTER: PRACTICAL MORE THAN THEORETICAL. If the Bible is a book for people, then its first task is to meet the needs of people. Thus Scripture is less like a theoretical treatise, a law code, or

a scientific report, and more like a family letter. It is God's letter to His family. Just as prayer is the opening of the heart to a friend, so Scripture is a letter from the Friend, communicated through Spirit-filled human friends. Some parts of Scripture clearly apply to the entire family; other parts address more specific needs. Its diversity enables it to meet the needs of all.

2. THE LAW PYRAMID: CODEBOOK AND CASEBOOK. The key for defining the unity of Scripture is the Law Pyramid. The ONE eternal principle of love, further defined by the TWO great commands and the TEN commandments, form the CODEBOOK portion of Scripture, a Law Pyramid that is universally authoritative, stable, and enduring. Everything else in Scripture is commentary, a CASEBOOK illustrating through a wide variety of cases, the application of the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN, in time and place. The implications of such an approach are significant:

   A. UNITY OF SCRIPTURE. Love, the pinnacle of the Law Pyramid, is both the unifying concept in Scripture and its motivational focus. It is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:10). The diversity in Scripture, which seems to approach outright contradiction at times, is part of God's plan to be all things to all people that by all means He might save some (1 Cor. 9:22).

   B. AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE. While the authoritative codebook elements in Scripture are found in the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN, every portion of Scripture is a concrete, albeit partial, revelation of God in time and place. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). But because that revelation is adapted to the conditions of fallen humanity, it partakes of the imperfections of that humanity. In the words of Ellen White: "Everything that is human is imperfect" (1SM, p. 20). Thus "God and Heaven alone are infallible" (CWE, p. 37).

   C. OBEDIENCE: DISTINCT AND INTERACTIVE ROLES FOR REVELATION, REASON, AND THE SPIRIT. For the Christian who seeks to obey the law of love, the casebook element in Scripture preserves the distinct but interactive roles for revelation, reason, and the Spirit. Scripture is a fixed and written revelation; human

reason is fallible and can be perverse; the Spirit is God's living and active presence. How do the three work together?

The cases preserved in Scripture (revelation) inform reason and provide the norms by which the Spirit is to be tested. At the same time, however, those cases cannot be understood or applied without reason, nor can the Spirit be tested without reason's sitting in judgment on the evidence. Yet without the Spirit, there would be no revelation in the first place. Furthermore, the Christian affirms that however essential reason is for understanding and applying revelation, only the presence of the Spirit can lead to a result motivated by love rather than selfishness. That presence is invited and maintained through prayer (cf. GC, p. vii).

In short, the Law Pyramid, by defining the relationship between CODEBOOK and CASEBOOK in Scripture, provides a model that integrates reason and revelation with the activity of the Spirit. As a result, the study of Scripture is inseparably bound up with the Christian's prayer life. And both are essential for the fulfillment of the law of love in the Christian's experience.

3. PRACTICAL BENEFITS. As compared with the traditional, more theoretical and Enlightenment-bound view of inspiration, the practical approach herein proposed offers significant benefits:

   A. PROTECTION AGAINST THE SLIPPERY SLOPE. By affirming the enduring value of the Law Pyramid and the universal validity of the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN, protection is provided against the slippery slope. Other aspects of God's revelation may be seen to be adapted to particular needs (e.g. laws on slavery, bigamy, blood vengeance) without undermining the authority of Scripture as a whole.

   B. ADAPTABILITY WITHOUT COMPROMISE. Recognizing the casebook element in Scripture allows apparent contradictions in Scripture to be seen as consistent adaptations of the law of love to the needs of individuals or groups in particular circumstances. Yet every adaptation can be seen as consistent with the ONE, the TWO, and the TEN.

   C. THE FUNCTIONAL NECESSITY OF THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE. The

cases preserved in Scripture are the raw materials which shape a Christian's understanding of present day obedience to God's law. But it is not enough to know Scripture. One must know God. Loving obedience is only possible in the presence of the Spirit, a presence invited through prayer.

D. BIBLE STUDY WITHOUT FEAR. When the unity of Scripture is seen more in its MOTIVATIONAL focus than in its theoretical content, then every passage of Scripture has a practical and concrete purpose that takes precedence over its abstract and doctrinal value. If the crucial question is how each passage serves to win allegiance to the law of love, then a both/and approach emerges which allows the believer to lay the messages of inspired writers side by side rather than on top of each other. The result is more like an orchestra than a single bugle call. Such an approach delivers the believer from two nagging fears and from one great danger, all of which are closely linked together:

i. THE FEAR THAT REASON WILL COMPETE WITH REVELATION. A strictly theoretical unity would require that every inspired writer "agree" with every other inspired writer in the interpretation of Scripture. Such an approach immediately sets up a damaging conflict between revelation and reason, for believers cannot truly "subordinate all preconceived opinions" in Bible study (CT, p. 433) if they already "know" what the text means on the basis of an "inspired" interpretation. By contrast, a MOTIVATIONAL focus for the unity of Scripture actually requires diversity "because the minds of men differ" (CT, p. 432). Since "God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible" (1SM, p. 21), it is possible to recognize the practical value of His various revelations even if the logic of the inspired writers is sometimes flawed. Revelation and reason are not in conflict, for revelation's task is to point to the law of love; reason's task is to describe and understand how each writer has done so.

ii. THE FEAR OF CONTRADICTION BETWEEN INSPIRED WRITERS. The claims of those who have rejected Scripture because of its "many contradictions" serve to heighten the fear of devout believers that their faith, too, might collapse in the face of some

fatal contradiction. Thus elaborate harmonizations are developed which can easily obscure the very features which made each message effective in the first place. A practical and motivational approach to Scripture allows the believer to appreciate diverse interpretations as part of God's larger purpose of bringing His whole family into the unity of the faith.

iii. THE DANGER OF AVOIDING THOUGHTFUL BIBLE STUDY. Some sensitive souls are driven to skepticism and away from Scripture by the "errors of popular theology," doctrines which "outrage" their "sense of justice, mercy, and benevolence" (GC, p. 525). Many others, however, perhaps more naturally religious, stay within the family of faith and avoid the hard questions. They "discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures," "become conservative and seek to avoid discussion." As a result, many "hold to tradition and worship they know not what" (5T, pp. 706, 707). A practical approach to inspiration, however, allows for continued study, dialogue, and disagreement. In 1888, Ellen White said that she did not regard as "correct" some of Dr. Waggoner's interpretations of Scripture, yet still considered him to be a faithful brother in the church. "The fact that he honestly holds some views of Scripture differing from yours or mine" was no cause for unjust criticism. Then, almost in the same breath, she affirmed that what Waggoner had presented "harmonizes perfectly" with the light God had given her over the years (Olson, pp. 301-305 [1981]). Contradiction? No. Ellen White could see his clear focus on the law of love, even while disagreeing with specific interpretations of Scripture.

That illustration highlights the most significant implication of a practical approach to inspiration: NO PASSAGE OF INSPIRED WRITING IS EVER CLOSED TO FURTHER STUDY AND FRESH INTERPRETATION. Other commentaries, even inspired ones, may be very helpful, but they are not the last word. All Scripture is inspired and is *always* "Profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning" (Lam. 3:22, 23). Scripture always stays new and fresh. All of it. Every morning. Not every passage for everyone every morning. But in God's great family, each person can find food in the Word. And when the children are fed, the family of God will be strong and secure.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

The Inspiration Issue in Adventist History

The Bible has always played a central role in Adventism. It gave birth to the movement. And when Christ did not return as expected in 1844, again the Bible kept the hope alive.

When Adventists first ventured to publish an unofficial "synopsis of our faith" (1872), the statement affirmed that "we have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline aside from the Bible." Similarly, our first "official" statement of beliefs (1931) maintained "that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments were given by inspiration of God, contain an all-sufficient revelation of His will to men, and are the only unerring rule of faith and practice."

Finally, when a full General Conference session discussed and voted for the first time a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs (1980), the preamble noted that Adventists "accept the Bible as their only creed."

In spite of straightforward claims about the role of the Bible, however, Adventists have experienced their share of difficulties in understanding the nature of Scripture. While trends within Adventism often parallel the general post-Enlightenment struggle over inspiration and revelation, a unique counterfoil inevitably colors the Adventist debate, namely, the writings of Ellen White, inspired messenger to the remnant. Three times in Adventism during the past century, the inspiration issue has bubbled past simmer to a near boil, with Ellen White's writings figuring prominently in each instance.

Scene 1: The 1880s

In the larger Christian world, the practice of "higher criticism" was on the verge of overwhelming orthodox Protestantism. Adventists, meanwhile, voted at the 1883 General Conference session to revise the *Testimonies for the Church* before reprinting them, noting that certain "imperfections" needed correction (see 3SM, p. 96 [also in Appendix B]).

Shortly thereafter, D. M. Canright, a talented but volatile man who had been in and out of the Adventist ministry at least four times, left for the last time, becoming a Baptist and writing *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced* (1889). In his attack against Adventism he cited the revision of the *Testimonies* as proof of their noninspiration.

In the same decade, Ellen White asked W. W. Prescott to assist with the revision of the historical quotations in *The Great Controversy*. Prescott was shaken by the request, probably because he had become enamored with the writings of François Gaussen, a staunch proponent of verbal inspiration. At Battle Creek College, Prescott's forceful presentations of Gaussen's views apparently convinced many, including Elder S. N. Haskell.

While Prescott himself seems to have found an acceptable solution to the inspiration issue, the Battle Creek incident continued to haunt the church. W. C. White, writing to LeRoy Froom in 1928, claimed that Prescott's presentations had brought into the work "questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing" (3SM, p. 454 [see Appendix B]).

Scene 2: The 1920s

In Protestantism in general, the Fundamentalist debate had driven a significant wedge between so-called mainstream Protestantism and those who still held to fundamental Christian positions. In popular thinking, the pastors and educators of the mainstream Protestant churches were viewed as highly educated critics who dissected the Bible but who did not believe. Reacting to that threat, conservative believers built Bible colleges and moved away from well-rounded educational institutions.

With the death of Ellen White in 1915, Adventists faced the increasingly urgent question of how to relate her writings to Scripture. The Bible conference of 1919 thoroughly aired the issue, but not to the satisfaction of many.

Two key personalities, A. G. Daniells and W. W. Prescott, propounded the so-called moderate view, a position that stressed contextual interpre-

tation and moved away from infallibility, verbal inspiration, and universal applicability. Both Daniells, General Conference president since 1901, and Prescott had enjoyed extensive personal contact with Ellen White. They affirmed her authority, but not her infallibility.

Daniells' strongest opponents, though not in attendance at the conference, reacted vigorously against him and the position he represented. At the 1922 General Conference session, J. S. Washburn circulated a 36-page letter against Daniells, part of a larger effort that ultimately prevented Daniells' reelection as General Conference president.

At the 1919 conference itself, cautious men, such as M. E. Kern and F. M. Wilcox, while admitting to the reasonableness of the "moderate" position, still expressed concern that that view might spread to the churches. "I believe there are a great many questions that we should hold back, and not discuss," said Wilcox. "I cannot conceive that it is necessary for us to answer every question that is put to us by students or others" (Couperus, pp. 45, 46).

Caution prevailed. Daniells and Prescott, the more outspoken moderates, were moved to the sidelines. The cautious moderates continued to influence the church, playing a significant role in what the church read and heard. Wilcox was editor of the *Review and Herald* magazine until he retired in 1944. Kern became dean of the Advanced Bible School in 1933, then president when it developed into the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary in 1936. From 1943 until his retirement in 1950, he was a field secretary of the General Conference and served as president of the board of trustees of the Ellen G. White Publications.

Since the mood of the church sided with the conservatives and cautious moderates, the minutes of the 1919 Bible conference were tucked away in the General Conference archives and forgotten. They resurfaced in 1974, just as the inspiration issue was heating up again.

Scene 3: The 1970s

Decades had passed since the fundamentalist debate had driven a deep wedge between liberal mainstream Protestant churches and the conservative ones that carried the label of evangelical or fundamentalist. Increasingly, higher education was "in" for so-called Bible-believing Christians. While retaining a firm faith in the inspiration of Scripture and in a personal God who answers prayer and performs miracles, tenacious young Christian scholars cautiously began using some of the analytical methods pioneered in the nineteenth century. They argued that they were

using these methods simply to describe what they saw in Scripture. They were seeking to build faith, not destroy it.

But the path was a dangerous one. For example, Concordia Seminary, of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, virtually disintegrated in the struggle as defenders of the two extreme positions denied the possibility of middle ground. When the confrontation came in February 1974, some 40 moderate and liberal professors and 400 students marched off the Concordia campus and set up their own seminary in exile (Seminex). They left behind the conservatives, just four professors, and 50 students.

Publications intensified the controversy. Harold Lindsell, then editor of *Christianity Today*, wrote a vigorous defense of inerrancy, *The Battle for the Bible* (1976). He followed with *The Bible in the Balance* (1979), a book that fingered professors, seminaries, and churches if Lindsell considered them weak on inspiration.

Adventism partially mirrored the struggle in Protestant circles. The one major difference, of course, was that Adventist discussions inevitably included consideration of the writings of Ellen White. Regardless of how one viewed the authority of Ellen White relative to the authority of Scripture, virtually all Adventists conceded that the *phenomenon* of inspiration as experienced by the writers of Scripture was the same phenomenon experienced by Ellen White.

Through the 1970s it was clear that a number of church leaders preferred a more conservative stance toward Scripture. But the level of interest in Ellen White's literary methods had heightened to the point where it was becoming increasingly difficult to apply the same conservative criteria to Scripture and to the writings of Ellen White.

The General Conference sponsored a Bible conference in 1974, which argued for a more conservative stance relative to Scripture. The crux of the issue was whether or not Adventist scholars could use the so-called historical-critical method in any form. The naturalistic presuppositions that are part of the method in its classical formulation are indeed problematic for Adventists. But many of the church's biblical scholars argued that the descriptive aspects of the method (e.g., the descriptive elements in source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism) could be used productively to serve the church's needs.

The conservative response (and the position generally held by the church's administrative leadership) was that use of any part necessitated the use of the whole.

Ironically, in 1974, the same year that the church sponsored the Bible

conference in an attempt to bring all its scholars into a more conservative line, the 1919 Bible conference minutes were rediscovered in the General Conference archives. Although the minutes were not published until 1979, when *Spectrum*, a lay journal sponsored by the Association of Adventist Forums, did so (without permission), Adventist scholars quickly became aware of the minutes and recognized immediately that the key issue of the 1919 conference was identical with the issue of the 1970s: inspiration. And again the inspiration question involved both the writings of Ellen White and Scripture.

Spectrum had been instrumental in initiating the move toward more critical analyses of Ellen White's writings. In the Autumn 1970 issue, William Peterson argued that Ellen White had not used the best historians in her chapter in *The Great Controversy* on the French Revolution, implying thereby that the use of lesser historical authorities diminished or destroyed her prophetic authority. Ron Graybill's rebuttal in the Summer 1972 issue was simple: Ellen White was not working from other historians; she simply quoted Uriah Smith.

Interestingly enough, perhaps the whole church had overlooked the statement in the introduction to *The Great Controversy* (GC, p. xii) in which Ellen White describes how she used the "published works" of her contemporaries in the Advent movement. Furthermore, she states that she used quotations from historians, not because they were authoritative, but because they were convenient.

The agitation over Ellen White's literary practices continued to mount, culminating in Walter Rea's vivid book, *The White Lie* (1982). The church began using modern critical methods to defend Ellen White against the charge of plagiarism. In the June 1982 issue of *Ministry*, Warren Johns discussed her literary borrowings with a degree of candor unusual in official Adventist publications.

As the decade of the seventies moved to a close, Desmond Ford's 1979 questioning of the church's sanctuary and judgment doctrine complicated significantly the inspiration issue. Was his stance determined (a) by his method or (b) by his experience or (c) by both? Under General Conference sponsorship, the specific doctrinal issue was addressed at Consultation I (Glacier View, Colorado, 1980); the methodological issue as it related to inspiration at Consultation II (Washington, D.C., 1981).

Influenced heavily by Ellen White's explicit statements on inspiration, the church's biblical scholars contributed to an important consensus of the working groups at Consultation II, namely, that the descriptive aspects

of the so-called historical-critical method could indeed be separated from naturalistic presuppositions and thus could be used by Adventist scholars. In point of fact, the descriptive methodologies were already being used in defense of Ellen White's literary methods.

In view of the line of reasoning adopted by many of the church's biblical scholars, it was not unexpected to see parallels from Scripture being cited in defense of Ellen White's methods. One of the more remarkable books occasioned by the debate was George Rice's *Luke, a Plagiarist?* Written for the thoughtful layperson, Rice's book studies how Luke's literary method is linked to the Gospel's theological perspective.

The debate over inspiration will likely continue in Adventism. Rice's approach presents intriguing possibilities for the study of the Bible. But it is still too early to tell whether his approach will carry the day among those in the mainstream of the church. And regardless of which side one may take in the debate, the Bible obviously maintains a mysterious grip on the community. And that is exactly why the debates have been so intense.

APPENDIX B

Revision of the *Testimonies for the Church*

With reference to the Adventist understanding of inspiration, one of the most significant events in our early history was the vote at the 1883 General Conference session to revise the *Testimonies*. That action is reproduced here (Number 1), along with Ellen White's letter to Uriah Smith, chairperson of the revision committee, when he was frozen into inaction because of opposition to the General Conference vote (Number 2), and a letter (excerpt) from W. C. White to L. E. Froom that comments on the General Conference action in the light of tendencies toward verbal inspiration in the church (Number 3). The documents reproduced here are found in *Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 96-98, 454, 455.

1. General Conference action of November 16, 1883 (3SM, p. 96):

"32. *Whereas*, Some of the bound volumes of the *Testimonies to the Church* are out of print, so that full sets cannot be obtained at the office; and,

"*Whereas*, There is a constant and urgent call for the reprinting of these volumes; therefore,

"*Resolved*, That we recommend their republication in such a form as to make four volumes of seven or eight hundred pages each.

"33. *Whereas*, Many of these testimonies were written under the most unfavorable circumstances, the writer being too heavily pressed with anxiety and labor to devote critical thought to the grammatical perfection

of the writings, and they were printed in such haste as to allow these imperfections to pass uncorrected; and,

"*Whereas*, We believe the light given by God to His servants is by the enlightenment of the mind, thus imparting the thoughts, and not (except in rare cases) the very words in which the ideas should be expressed; therefore,

"*Resolved*, That in the republication of these volumes, such verbal changes be made as to remove the above-named imperfections, as far as possible, without in any measure changing the thought; and further,

"*Resolved*, That this body appoint a committee of five to take charge of the republication of these volumes according to the above preambles and resolutions" (*Review and Herald*, Nov. 27, 1883).

"The committee of five to take charge of the republication of the testimonies provided for in the thirty-fourth resolution was announced as follows, the chair having been empowered to select four persons besides himself for this purpose: W. C. White, Uriah Smith, J. H. Waggoner, S. N. Haskell, George I. Butler" (*ibid.*).

2. Letter 11, 1884, Ellen White to Uriah Smith, written from Healdsburg, California, February 19, 1884 (3SM, pp. 96-98):

"Dear Brother Smith: I have today mailed you a letter, but information has been received from Battle Creek that the work upon *Testimonies* is not accepted.

"I wish to state some matters, which you can do what you please with. These statements you have heard me make before—that I was shown years ago that we should not delay publishing the important light given me because I could not prepare the matter perfectly. My husband was at times very sick, unable to give me the help that I should have had and that he could have given me had he been in health. On this account I delayed putting before the people that which has been given me in vision.

"But I was shown that I should present before the people in the best manner possible the light received; then as I received greater light, and as I used the talent God had given me, I should have increased ability to use in writing and in speaking. I was to improve everything, as far as possible bringing it to perfection, that it might be accepted by intelligent minds.

"As far as possible every defect should be removed from all our publications. As the truth should unfold and become widespread, every care should be exercised to perfect the works published.

"I saw in regard to Brother Andrews' *History of the Sabbath*, that he

delayed the work too long. Other erroneous works were taking the field and blocking the way, so that minds would be prejudiced by the opposing elements. I saw that thus much would be lost. After the first edition was exhausted, then he could make improvements; but he was seeking too hard to arrive at perfection. This delay was not as God would have it.

"Now, Brother Smith, I have been making a careful, critical examination of the work that has been done on the *Testimonies*, and I see a few things that I think should be corrected in the matter brought before you and others at the General Conference [November 1883]. But as I examine the matter more carefully I see less and less that is objectionable. Where the language used is not the best, I want it made correct and grammatical, as I believe it should be in every case where it can be without destroying the sense. This work is delayed, which does not please me. . . .

"My mind has been exercised upon the question of the *Testimonies* that have been revised. We have looked them over more critically. I cannot see the matter as my brethren see it. I think the changes will improve the book. If our enemies handle it, let them do so. . . .

"I think that anything that shall go forth will be criticized, twisted, turned, and boggled, but we are to go forward with a clear conscience, doing what we can and leaving the result with God. We must not be long in delaying the work.

"Now, my brethren, what do you propose to do? I do not want this work dragging along any longer. I want something done, and done now."

3. Excerpt from W. C. White letter to L. E. Froom, January 8, 1928 (3SM, pp. 454, 455):

"You refer to the little statement which I sent you regarding verbal inspiration. This statement made by the General Conference of 1883 was in perfect harmony with the beliefs and positions of the pioneers in this cause, and it was, I think, the only position taken by any of our ministers and teachers until Prof. [W. W.] Prescott, president of Battle Creek College, presented in a very forceful way another view—the view held and presented by Professor Gausen.* The acceptance of that view by the students in the Battle Creek College and many others, including Elder Haskell, has resulted in bringing into our work questions and perplexities without end, and always increasing.

* Probably François Gaussen, a Swiss clergyman (1790-1863), who maintained that the Bible was verbally inspired.

"Sister White never accepted the Gausen theory regarding verbal inspiration, either as applied to her own work or as applied to the Bible."

APPENDIX C

The Meaning of the Word "Apocrypha"

A good dictionary of the Bible should give a survey of the various meanings of the word "apocrypha." The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* includes a solid article that is readily accessible to Adventists. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* offers a more comprehensive one.

The popular usage of the term in the sense of "spurious" or "false" complicates the possibility of using the adjective "apocryphal" in a more neutral and simply descriptive sense. When someone says "That story is apocryphal," we understand them to mean that it is not true or genuine.

As applied to books written in the biblical era, however, the term has undergone at least three stages of development. In the first instance, it is a Greek plural neuter adjective meaning "hidden" (books). In that sense it was a term of honor, implying that the books were worthy of reading, but only for the initiated. The tradition that some books were public while others were private and intended only for the worthy is reflected in a Jewish book written in the first century A.D., IV Ezra 14:45-47, a book now found in the Protestant Apocrypha.

It is possible that this tradition of hidden books led to the second usage of apocrypha as meaning "spurious" or "heretical." Such a usage would have originated among those who were not deemed worthy to read and who thus could be easily tempted to think that these books were somehow opposed to an orthodox faith. On occasion, in the early Christian centuries, books labeled as "apocrypha" actually were banned from both public and private use. The Christian Fathers Athanasius (died 373) and

Rufinus (died 410) both used apocrypha in this sense of "spurious" or "heretical."

The use of the word to refer simply to books that were excluded from the canon goes back to Jerome (died 420). For him, apocryphal did not mean "heretical" but simply "noncanonical." The article in the *SDA Bible Dictionary* uses the term "as in the Reformed churches, to designate the 15 documents found in some Greek and Latin manuscripts of the OT, but which were not included in the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures" (SDABD, p. 52).

BOOKS OF THE APOCRYPHA: The following list of 15 items (from HBD) describes the contents of the Protestant "Apocrypha." With the exception of 2 Esdras (4 Ezra), Catholics generally consider most of them authoritative (cf. HBD, p. 36):

1 Esdras
2 Esdras (4 Ezra)
Tobit
Judith
The Rest of the Book of Esther
The Wisdom of Solomon
Ecclesiasticus (Sirach)
Baruch
A Letter of Jeremiah
The Additions to the Book of Daniel
    The Song of the Three Children (with the prayer of Azariah)
    Susanna
    Bel and the Dragon
The Prayer of Manasseh
1 Maccabees
2 Maccabees

APPENDIX D

Old Testament Names for God

Centuries of Christian usage have so accustomed our ears to the use of the words "Lord" and "God" with reference to the one whom we worship that we can easily overlook the significance of the variety of the names and titles that the Old Testament writers applied to God.

During the early history of God's people, the worship of one Supreme Being as the God of the entire universe (monotheism) was not so readily evident as it is today in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Israel came out of a polytheistic environment in Egypt, where worship of many gods abounded. Years of slavery in such an environment made Israel vulnerable to pagan tendencies. The golden calf incident at Sinai and the frequent apostasies, both during the era of the judges and during the monarchy, testify to the powerful attraction that pagan deities and forms of worship had for ancient Israel.

Because of God's practical and pastoral concern for His people, His first priority was to establish the principle that Israel should worship one God and only one. Israel's neighbors in Canaan all had a pantheon of many deities, even if they each had one supreme deity. But in Israel there would be no pantheon. The first command of the Decalogue clearly stated: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3).

Note, however, that the command speaks only of the object of Israel's worship. It does not rule out the existence of other gods for other nations. In fact, some biblical passages clearly imply that God chose Israel as His own people, but assigned other "gods" to the other nations. Thus Deuteronomy 29:26 suggests that Israel's great apostasy would lie in

serving other gods "whom they had not known and whom *he had not allotted to them*" (cf. Deut. 32:8, 9).

From a Christian perspective, we would probably tend to interpret such phraseology as meaning that God had turned the pagan nations over to Satan and his cohorts. The Old Testament, however, speaks of the "gods" allotted to the other nations. "For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever" (Micah 4:5, KJV).

This view, that each nation had its own deity, a common one in the ancient Near East, constituted a major obstacle to the belief that there was really only one God worthy of the name: Israel's God. Even many in Israel were prepared to believe that Chemosh of the Ammonites and Moabites was something more than a chunk of wood or stone (cf. Judges 11:24; 2 Kings 3:27). The same would presumably go for the god Rimmon of Syria (cf. 2 Kings 5:15-19) and Dagon of the Philistines (cf. 1 Sam. 5:1-5).

But in Israel there was one God, the Lord. The great contest on Mount Carmel between the Lord and Baal shows just how crucial the struggle between the Lord and the other deities was seen to be. "If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). This battle makes the Old Testament names and titles for God an intriguing topic to pursue.

Israel could use any one of a number of names or titles for her God. *Lord* and *God* are two of the general titles that were used a great deal. Yet these could be ambiguous because there were "many lords" and "many gods" (1 Cor. 8:5, 6). Thus it became important for Israel to have a specific personal name for God. This name was Yahweh, a name first explained to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:13-15).

Some modern versions of the Bible actually use Yahweh throughout the Old Testament, but most English translations continue with the traditional use of LORD or GOD (large and small capitals) as a substitute for the name Yahweh. Behind that tradition, however, is a story worth noting.

After the Israelites returned from the Babylonian exile, the realization began to dawn upon them that their disobedience and disregard for God's law had caused their difficulties. To prevent that problem from arising again, they not only began to reverence the law but also began to "build a fence around the law." They wanted to have double protection against transgression.

Thus—in connection with the Sabbath commandment, for example—they were not content to leave the simple command "Thou shalt do no

work." They further defined that command into 39 major types of forbidden work, with additional comments and provisions under each of these major categories.

In connection with the command not to take the name of the Lord in vain, they took the additional step of avoiding the name of God altogether. This attitude gave rise to all manner of substitutes. One list gives no less than 91 rabbinic synonyms for God (Marmorstein, pp. 54-107).

But this decision never to allow the name of God on one's lips gave rise to certain practical difficulties when one read Scripture, because the name *Yahweh* most certainly appeared in the biblical text. The solution to this problem (one that became fixed in Jewish and Christian tradition) was the regular substitution of the words "Lord" (*Adonai*) or "God" (*Elohim*) whenever the name *Yahweh* appeared in the text. This tradition was already firmly established several centuries before Christ, for the Septuagint, the first translation of the Old Testament into another language (Greek), regularly translated *Yahweh* by *Kyrios* (Lord), the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word *Adonai*.

This substitution for *Yahweh*, stemming originally from great reverence for the divine name, continues right up to our own day and is reflected in most of the major English translations. The KJV, RSV, NEB, NASB, and NIV, all use LORD (or in some instances GOD) in place of *Yahweh*. A similar practice prevails in the Bibles of other languages as well (for instance, *Dominus* in Latin, *Herr* in German, *l'Eternel* in French). In fact, this traditional substitution has been so deeply established for such a long time that scholars are still not entirely certain what the original meaning or pronunciation of the name might have been, though *Yahweh* is the generally accepted English equivalent.

In this connection the curious word "Jehovah" is of interest. Apparently the word was coined as an equivalent for *Yahweh* about A.D. 1520 by Peter Galatinus. He fused the vowels of *Adonai* with the consonants of the so-called tetragrammaton YHWH.

This strange combination became possible because of the remarkable manner in which later Jews came to treat the biblical text, a matter that deserves at least a brief explanation.

Since the Hebrew alphabet contains no true vowel signs, the original Hebrew Old Testament was written with consonants only. The proper vowel sounds were simply passed along as part of the living tradition as long as speakers continued to use the language. But as Hebrew fell out of use, the pronunciation of the biblical text became increasingly problem-

atic. Finally between A.D. 500 and 1000 the Masoretes, a group of Jewish scribes, took in hand the task of preserving the pronunciation that they considered correct. But since Hebrew had no signs for indicating the vowels and since these scribes also treated every "jot and tittle" of the biblical text with great respect, they developed a clever system of indicating the vowel sounds that left the position and the order of the consonants absolutely intact. This system consisted simply of various dots and lines written under, over, and within the letters.

When the Masoretes came to the divine name, however, they faced a problem, for it was never pronounced the way it was written. Whenever the consonants YHWH appeared, what came out of the reader's mouth was not *Yahweh*, but *Adonai* (Lord) or *Elohim* (God). The Masoretes decided to leave the consonants of *Yahweh* but to add the vowels of *Adonai*. Careful Jewish readers would recognize, of course, that they must say the word that went with the vowels (*Adonai*), never the one signified by the consonants (*Yahweh*).

Not until the sixteenth century, however, was any attempt made to fuse the vowels of *Adonai* with the consonants YHWH. But when that fusion did happen, the result was Y a H o W a H, or to use the more familiar J/Y and V/W interchange, J a H o V a H. Slightly modifying the first vowel then yields the familiar "Jehovah."

Such a word would never have found its way onto Jewish lips. But for some reason, it became well-established in Christian circles as the "real" name of Israel's God, *Yahweh*. Some modern translations (e.g., *The Jerusalem Bible*) have attempted to reestablish the real name of Israel's God by using *Yahweh*. But most major translations in English retain the traditional words reflecting *oral* usage in the Jewish synagogue.

The translators have been kind enough, however, to give us a secret code so that we can detect an original Yahweh when we read our English Bibles. The rule is: **Whenever LORD or GOD (all upper case) appears in the Old Testament, it represents an original *Yahweh* in the Hebrew.** The tabulation at the end of this appendix should prove useful in clarifying this way of distinguishing *Yahweh* from the other names for God.

It should be noted that the word *Elohim* is actually plural in form, but can be translated as singular or plural depending on the context (cf. the English word *sheep*). That ambiguity can be crucial in some contexts in which it is not absolutely clear whether the sentence is dealing with the true God, a false god, or many gods.

In conclusion, what is the significance of these various names and titles for God?

First, knowing the personal touch that is implied by the use of *Yahweh* can be quite meaningful. Such passages as Exodus 3:13-15; 6:2-6 become moving indeed as we see *Yahweh* describing the significance of His name to Moses.

Second, the names of God have been very much used in critical studies of the Bible. A difference in the divine names has been taken as an indication of a difference in the oral or written material on which the biblical text is based. Probably too much has been read into such differences in usage, and far-reaching conclusions have sometimes been reached on the basis of very slender threads. Yet the fact remains that the first Creation story (Genesis 1) uses God (*Elohim*) exclusively, whereas the stories in Genesis 2, 3 use LORD God (*Yahweh Elohim*). Furthermore, in the Psalms some sections of the psalter prefer *Elohim* and some prefer *Yahweh*. In one instance, two virtually identical psalms appear in our book of Psalms, one using *Elohim* (Ps. 14), and the other using *Yahweh* (Ps. 53). Reasons for these differences are not at all self-evident, but they do represent a challenging field for further research.

In short, being able to recognize the clues to the names for God in our traditional English translations can provide both devotional and scholarly insights into the Old Testament. As the Old Testament story progresses, we can observe with great interest the efforts of *Yahweh* to convince Israel first that He, *Yahweh*, is their God, and second, that He is God of all the universe. The task was not easy, but Judaism and Christianity testify to the ultimate triumph of that conviction. In fact, the conviction is so well established for us that we sometimes find it difficult to recognize how hard it was for ancient Israel to make that conviction her own.

It should be noted, however, that knowing the right name for God certainly is not essential for a vibrant Christian experience. Occasionally, devout groups of worshipers (not just limited to Jehovah's Witnesses), have felt that using Jehovah or Yahweh was crucial to a person's salvation. But the fact that the entire New Testament could be written in Greek without once addressing God or even referring to Him by His Old Testament name, clearly shows that knowledge of it is an enrichment, not a necessity.

And lest we be too hard on those devout Jews who began the tradition of avoiding the use of God's name, it is helpful to note similar attitudes towards authority in our own day. When I was a youth pastor at the

beginning of my ministry, for example, the young people in my church really didn't know which label to use. My first name was too personal (at least in the hearing of their parents), and Pastor Thompson sounded too formal. In the end, they ingeniously formed a substitute name, PT (Pastor Thompson), cleverly sidestepping the seeming dangers involved with my two *real* names.

As far as God is concerned, it is more important that we talk to Him and about Him than to have precisely the right name in mind, though each one of us has to find a name that "fits." That is what believers have always done and must continue to do.

English	Hebrew	Applications and Meaning
LORD or GOD	= *Yahweh*	= specific name of Israel's God, the great "I AM" (cf. Ex. 3:13-15).
Lord	= *Adonai*	= general term for any authority figure; in the consonantal Hebrew text can apply to God or to human beings.
God	= *Elohim* or *El*	= general term for God; the term can apply to God, god, or gods.

APPENDIX E

"I Was to Improve Everything"

The Implications for Prophetic Authority

The difference between casual and analytical reading affects not only ordinary people, but inspired writers as well. Just as Paul (Gal. 3:17) picked up the 430-year period from the LXX on the basis of casual reading, so Ellen White picked up the sum of 2 million Israelites leaving Egypt through the casual reading of Scripture. Several passages state that there were some 600,000 adult males in Israel at the time of the Exodus (e.g., Num. 1:46). As discussed in Chapter 19, however, a closer and analytical study of the data in Scripture suggests that significantly fewer than 2 million left Egypt.

The question of prophetic authority naturally arises, especially in view of the tradition that inspired writers are infallible sources for whatever details they cite. For those who hold such a view, turning away from an exodus of 2 million people raises the specter of the slippery slope.

Taking a cue from Ellen White's comments to Uriah Smith in connection with the editing of the *Testimonies*, however, we glimpse a different view of the prophetic office, one that concentrates on practical applications while allowing traces of human imperfections to appear in the writings of the messenger.

When she says "I was to improve everything" (3SM, p. 97), she was talking about the instruction she had received to get her message out in the best possible way, not waiting until everything had been polished to perfection. The letter is found in Appendix B and is discussed further below.

Now, if inspired writers pick up some details on the basis of casual

reading, we have additional reasons for avoiding the practice of citing an inspired writer to solve technical problems in Scripture. Chapter 18 ("Inspired Writers Quoting Inspired Writers") has already addressed the difficulties that arise when we attempt to allow one inspired writer to be a final interpreter of a passage produced by another inspired writer.

Although Ellen White constantly interpreted Scripture, she refused to serve as an authority when asked to pass judgment on such issues as the law in Galatians 3 and the "daily" in the book of Daniel. George Knight's chapter "Crisis in Authority" in *Angry Saints* (Knight, pp. 100-115) offers an excellent discussion of the topic. *Selected Messages*, book 1, pages 164-168, includes pertinent quotations relative to the issue of the "daily."

It is helpful to recognize that Ellen White herself deliberately focused her prophetic ministry on the practical issues facing the church and its members. And when I use that word "practical," I am not suggesting any other function than that filled by any other inspired writer, Bible writers included. As Ellen White herself said, "the Bible was given for practical reasons" (1SM, p. 20).

Some have attempted to assign a pastoral role to Ellen White as a means of distinguishing her authority from that of Scripture. But all prophets are pastoral. All are practical. And I would argue that both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White are only doctrinal insofar as they are practical.

We may surmise Ellen White's own understanding of her role from her description of how she and her husband, James, worked together in the early days of their common ministry: "Our meetings were usually conducted in such a manner that both of us took part. My husband would give a doctrinal discourse, then I would follow with an *exhortation of considerable length, melting my way into the feelings of the congregation*. Thus my husband sowed and I watered the seed of truth, and God did give the increase" (1T, p. 75, italics mine).

If her early role focused less on strict doctrinal preaching and more on the practical work of exhorting and "melting" her way into the feelings of the congregation, her later role was similar. When defending her ministry in *Testimonies*, volume 5, she argued that she did not need a fresh vision every time she saw "men and women taking the very course, or cherishing the very traits, which have imperiled other souls and wounded the cause of God, and which the Lord has reproved again and again" (5T, pp. 686, 687).

She primarily concerned herself with the lives of people, and she

addressed the needs wherever she saw them. If that is the case, then, we must address the issue of how to relate more strictly historical material to the more practical aspects of her ministry. And in this same connection we touch on aspects of her writings that seem to have come by way of the casual reading of Scripture.

Relationship Between History and Practical Application

The relationship of historical material to her practical prophetic task is outlined in the Introduction to *The Great Controversy.* This same passage is significant enough to reproduce here. And not just incidentally, the same passage may also be helpful in addressing the question of how the historical material in Scripture relates to its practical function. I have italicized key phrases:

"The great events which have marked the progress of reform in past ages are matters of [1] *history, well known and universally acknowledged* by the Protestant world; they are facts which none can gainsay. This history I have presented briefly, in accordance with the scope of the book, and the brevity which must necessarily be observed, the [2] *facts having been condensed into as little space as seemed consistent with a proper understanding of their application.* In some cases where a historian has so grouped together events as to afford, in brief, a comprehensive view of the subject, or has [3] *summarized details in a convenient manner,* his words have been quoted; but in some instances no specific credit has been given, since the *quotations are not given for the purpose of citing that writer as authority, but because his statement affords a ready and forcible presentation of the subject.* In narrating the experience and views of those carrying forward the work of reform in our own time, similar use has been made of their published works" (GC, pp. xi, xii, italics mine).

Three special points are worth noting:

1. The historical facts in the book did not come by way of revelation, but from history that was "well known and universally acknowledged." Because even well-known, common-knowledge facts can sometimes be wrong, when Ellen White and her staff discovered such instances, they did not hesitate to put things right in later editions. Her request to W. W. Prescott to improve the historical quotations in *The Great Controversy* illustrates the point—even if her request shook Prescott (see Appendix A).

2. The facts were viewed as subservient to a "proper understanding of their application." The primary thrust of a prophet's ministry is application. Facts are only means to a greater end.

3. Authors were cited, not as authorities, but because their statements were convenient. When Ellen White used such expressions as "ready" and "forcible" to describe the contributions of other writers, she revealed a primary concern for practicality. While placing primary importance upon clarity of communication, she was not uninterested in presenting history that was also technically accurate. That was why she did not hesitate to correct details or substitute better quotations in later editions of her books.

That Ellen White's Conflict of the Ages Series was preceded by two earlier editions covering much of the same ground provides us with the unique opportunity to observe the editing process and the steps taken to improve her books.

Her explicit views on the matter are contained in a candid letter to Uriah Smith, who had been asked to chair a committee dealing with the revision of the *Testimonies*. Finding considerable resistance among the believers, Uriah Smith needed prodding from Ellen White to proceed with the editing project as voted by the 1883 General Conference session.

Her letter to him [Appendix C, item 2] contains the following remarkable statement: "I was shown that I should present before the people in the best manner possible the light received; then as I received greater light, and as I used the talent God had given me, I should have increased ability to use in writing and in speaking. *I was to improve everything, as far as possible bringing it to perfection*, that it might be accepted by intelligent minds" (3SM, pp. 96, 97, italics mine).

Ellen White then lamented the delay in the appearance of J. N. Andrews' *History of the Sabbath*: "Other erroneous works were taking the field" and prejudicing minds. Andrews should have gotten the book out, she argued. "After the first edition of the book was exhausted, *then he could make improvements; but he was seeking too hard to arrive at perfection*."

Turning again to her own works, she disagreed with the brethren who were reluctant to see them edited. "I think the changes will improve the book. If our enemies handle it, let them do so," she said. "I think that anything that shall go forth will be criticized, twisted, turned, and boggled, but we are to go forward with a clear conscience, doing what we can and leaving the result with God" (3SM, pp. 97, 98, italics mine).

When the edited version of the *Testimonies* finally appeared, "enemies" did handle it; it was indeed "criticized, twisted, turned, and boggled," with former Adventist preacher D. M. Canright leading the way.

In his book *Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced*, Canright offered the following critique of the revised *Testimonies*. "Opening haphazard to four different pages in volume 1, I read and compared them with the original publication which I have. I found on an average *twenty-four changes of the words on each page*! Her words were thrown out and other words put in, and other changes made, in some cases so many that it was difficult to read the two together. At the same rate, in the four volumes, there would be 63,720 changes. Taking, then, the words which were put in by her husband, by her copyist, by her son, by her editors, and those copied from other authors, probably they comprise from one tenth to one quarter of all her books. Fine inspiration that is!" (Canright, p. 141).

Ellen White's view of inspiration was clearly too flexible for Canright. If, however, Adventists wish to follow in the path suggested by Ellen White (and not that of Canright), then we too will allow for a more pragmatic, flexible approach to inspiration, one that allows the writer to adapt, apply, and mold the message, improving it whenever possible. And this more flexible view of inspiration also enables us to be realistic with what we find in Scripture. We do not need to force Scripture into a man-made straitjacket that does not match theory with the text.

Specific illustrations from the three editions of the Conflict set are particularly useful in identifying the kinds of changes and editing that we might expect from the pen of an inspired writer. And the illustrations here are often more dramatic than the kind of fine-tuning that the revised *Testimonies* received. The three successive editions, all of which are currently in print (the first two as facsimile reprints), are as follows, given here with the inclusive dates of original publication:

Spiritual Gifts, Volumes I-IV, 1858-1864
The Spirit of Prophecy, Volumes I-IV, 1870-1884
The Conflict of the Ages, Volumes 1-5, 1890-1917

Of the examples that follow, the first three illustrate the kinds of variations that can be substantiated on the basis of a comparison of the three editions. The remaining examples are similar in that they illustrate how God works with His messengers in time and place. As time moves on and knowledge increases, the messenger will need—and want—to incorporate some changes, thus making it possible to "improve everything, as far as possible bringing it to perfection."

And when an analytical reading of the text calls into question a casual

reading, the prophet must respond appropriately, adding to, deleting from, or modifying the text. Because God works with His messengers within the limits of their own human environment, we must constantly seek to look at an inspired writer's *practical application* as it would have been understood when the message was given.

Improving the Prophet's Works

1. Theological Development: Hope for the Fallen Lucifer—The three successive editions reveal three different perspectives on God and His law as related to Lucifer. *Spiritual Gifts* depicts the judgment of law as being swift and unbending. Lucifer is summarily dismissed. When he repents after his expulsion, no one in heaven shows the slightest sympathy for the rebel and his cohorts. "Their sin, their hate, their envy and jealousy, had been so great that God could not blot it out" (1SG, p. 19).

In *The Spirit of Prophecy* a trace of sympathy appears. First, the loyal angels attempt to persuade Lucifer to submit to God (1SP, p. 20). Even Christ weeps when Lucifer begs for readmission. But the law is unforgiving. There is no hope, for "sin and rebellion [had] originated with him" (1SP, p. 29).

In *Patriarchs and Prophets* law is no longer an impenetrable barrier. God Himself bears long with Lucifer, even offering him the possibility of restoration after the rebellion had broken out into the open. "Though he had left his position as covering cherub, yet if he had been willing to return to God, acknowledging the Creator's wisdom, and satisfied to fill the place appointed him in God's great plan, he would have been reinstated in his office" (PP, p. 39).

The shifts in interpretation correlate with Ellen White's developing understanding of law.

Initially she tended to see law as external, arbitrary, and authoritarian, with *power* being the leading feature of God's character. But her understanding gradually was transformed until she came to see God's law as internal, natural, and nonauthoritarian, with *goodness* being the leading feature of God's character.

Additional explanation and documentation can be found in my series "From Sinai to Golgotha," *Adventist Review*, Dec. 3, 10, 17, 24, 31, 1981; July 1, 1982; *Westwind* [Walla Walla College alumni journal], Winter 1982.

2. Identity of Historical Characters: The Herods of the New Testament—It is impossible for the uninitiated or casual reader to keep all the New Testament Herods straight. By comparing the biblical account

with external sources, we can identify the following Herods more specifically: (a) Herod the Great (Jesus' birth); (b) Herod Antipas (Jesus' death); (c) Herod Agrippa I (execution of James; imprisonment of Peter); (d) Herod Agrippa II (dialogue with Paul).

In volume 1 of *Spiritual Gifts* Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa are seen as one person: "Herod's heart grew still harder, and when he heard that Jesus had arisen, he was not much troubled. He took the life of James; and when he saw that this pleased the Jews, he took Peter also, intending to put him to death. But God had a work for Peter to do, and sent his angel and delivered him. Herod was visited with judgment. God smote him in the sight of a great multitude as he was exalting himself before them, and he died a horrible death" (1SG, p. 71).

In the expanded account in volume 3 of *The Spirit of Prophecy*, probably on the basis of additional reading and research, the confusion is resolved. The narrative describing the reaction to Jesus' resurrection concludes with a reference to Pilate. No Herod is mentioned (3SP, p. 198). After a considerable expansion of the post-Resurrection story, Herod (Agrippa) is introduced as a distinct person and correctly linked with the persecution of the apostles (3SP, p. 334).

3. Understanding of Biblical Customs: Jesus' Response to His Mother at the Wedding of Cana—Jesus' seemingly abrupt response to His mother, recorded in John 2:4 ("O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour is not yet come") is interpreted in *The Spirit of Prophecy* as a rebuke: "In *rebuking* his mother, Jesus also rebukes a large class who have an idolatrous love for their family, and allow the ties of relationship to draw them from the service of God. Human love is a sacred attribute; but should not be allowed to mar our religious experience, or draw our hearts from God" (2SP, pp. 101, 102, italics mine).

The parallel passage in *The Desire of Ages* interprets Jesus' answer simply as a polite response in keeping with the customs of the time: "This answer, abrupt as it seems to us, expressed no coldness or discourtesy. The Saviour's form of address to His mother was *in accordance with Oriental custom*. It was used toward persons to whom it was desired to show respect" (DA, p. 146, italics mine).

The more gentle view in *The Desire of Ages* is undoubtedly a result of Ellen White's transformed understanding of law. The view of the family in *The Spirit of Prophecy* suggests a tension between one's human obligations and one's obligations to God, as though one must choose between them. Ellen White's later perspective unites rather than divides our

obligations to God and family, bringing them together under the umbrella of the one great law of love. The result is that one best serves God *through* the family: "God designs that the families of earth shall be a symbol of the family in heaven. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are among His most effective agencies for the formation of Christian character and for the advancement of His work.

"If parents desire to see a different state of things in their families, let them consecrate themselves wholly to God and cooperate with Him in the work whereby a transformation may take place in their households" (6T, p. 430).

The unifying concept of the one great law of love as a natural law flowing from God's character lends a different spirit to *The Desire of Ages* and reflects a different view of the family. Until that concept is fully crystallized, however, obligations to God and family are both portrayed as *requirements* more than a service of love.

Note how the following comment, relative to Jesus' words on divorce in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:31, 32), illustrates that emphasis: "Jesus strikes at the primary cause of the laxness with which the marriage relation was held, when He condemns the unholy passions which find the marriage institution a barrier to the gratification of their lust. Christ would have the marriage relation hedged about with judicial restrictions, so that there could be no legal separation between husband and wife, save for the cause of adultery" (2SP, pp. 221, 222).

4. Science and Health: Pork, Phrenology, and Mesmerism—Some of our more flamboyant articles about Ellen White have claimed that the health insights given to her through visions were years ahead of the times. The chapter title "Science Catches Up With a Prophet" in Rene Noorbergen's *Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny* (1972) certainly leaves that impression, and the content of the chapter is consistent with the title. Even D. E. Robinson's more sober account, *The Story of Our Health Message*, leaves a similar impression when describing the primary health reform vision of 1863. "In this memorable vision there was a presentation of basic principles which, although now established and accepted as scientific, were in advance of the general knowledge of the time."

Robinson goes on to say, however, that the greatest contribution of the vision was not the enunciation of correct health principles, but "that it is a part of *religious duty* to care for the body temple" (D. Robinson, p. 79, italics mine). Elder J. H. Waggoner is then quoted in support of that point. Remarkably, Waggoner's quotation opens with the statement "We do *not*

profess to be pioneers in the general principles of the health reform" (RH, Aug. 7, 1866; italics mine).

More recent discussions of the history of health reform and Ellen White's contribution to it have reiterated Waggoner's point, showing how the visions provided *religious motivation* for adopting reforms *already* initiated by others. These reforms have shown a tenacious staying power in the Adventist community precisely because Adventists have seen health as a religious duty.

Actually, a prophet is much more likely to remind God's people of neglected duties than to reveal brand-new ones. Nathan's rebuke of David's sin with Bathsheba was not a new revelation. David knew perfectly well that adultery—overlaid with murder, even—was wrong. But somehow the message "You are the man," spoken over the tip of Nathan's bony finger, brought David's memory back to life.

The reason for the significant loss of confidence in the writings of Ellen White among Adventists in recent years stems partly from discoveries that she was *not* years ahead of her day, but very much a part of it.

Interestingly enough, the same kind of discoveries can be made quite readily from the published *Testimonies* themselves. Note the following early (1858) testimony about pork, issued to a brother and sister who had already taken a stand: "I saw that your views concerning swine's flesh would prove no injury if you have them to yourselves; but in your judgment and opinion you have made this question a test, and your actions have plainly shown your faith in this matter. If God requires His people to abstain from swine's flesh, He will convict them on the matter. He is just as willing to show His honest children their duty, as to show their duty to individuals upon whom He has not laid the burden of His work. If it is the duty of the church to abstain from swine's flesh, God will discover it to more than two or three. He will teach His *church* their duty" (1T, pp. 206, 207).

In light of the 1863 vision, the church *did* adopt the position that unclean animals (swine included) were not to be eaten. As a result, James White added an interesting explanatory note to the testimony on pork: "This remarkable testimony was written October 21, 1858, nearly five years before the great vision of 1863, in which the light upon health reform was given. When the right time came, the subject was given in a manner to move all our people. How wonderful are the wisdom and goodness of God! It might be as wrong to crowd the milk, salt, and sugar

question now, as the pork question in 1858" (1T, p. 206 [James White's note to second edition, 1871]).

Measured against an absolute standard, the 1858 quotation could be said to be uninformed, incomplete, or even wrong. But given the principle of growth, it was exactly the right message.

A similar situation existed relative to phrenology and mesmerism. Phrenology involved the study of the natural bumps on the head as a supposed guide to intelligence; mesmerism was apparently similar to hypnotism. In 1864 the Whites had taken their sons Willie and Edson to a phrenologist and received a positive interpretation for both of them. Ronald Numbers, who reports the incident in a less-than-positive light (Numbers, pp. 90, 91), seems to assume an absolute once-true-always-true model for the phenomena of revelation and inspiration, not unlike a conservative fundamentalist holding to inerrancy. The difference is that Numbers points to evidence suggesting that the model does not work.

And he is quite right that the once-true-always-true model does not correlate with the evidence. But it does not follow that revelation and inspiration are therefore not present. A growth model fits the evidence quite nicely. If there is a God who is concerned about the health and well-being of His people, He will help them grow gradually.

Given the impact of culture on the prophet's world and audience, some elements will be embedded in the prophet's message that fall short of absolute truth. But given the circumstances prevailing when the message comes, those elements are quite understandable.

Ellen White's early experience with a phrenologist correlates with what she had written in 1862: "Phrenology and mesmerism are very much exalted. They are good in their place, but they are seized upon by Satan as his most powerful agents to deceive and destroy souls" (1T, p. 296).

Would we be able to concur that "phrenology and mesmerism are good in their place," given what we know today? Probably not. But note the revised edition of that same statement, written in 1884: "The sciences which treat of the human mind are very much exalted. They are good in their place; but they are seized upon by Satan as his powerful agents to deceive and destroy souls" (ST, Nov. 6, 1884).

The traditional way of explaining these statements is as follows: (1) an author is always consistent with himself or herself, and (2) a clear statement explains one that is problematic. Therefore, what Ellen White said in 1884 (the statement that seems clear to us) is what she really meant to say in 1862.

Such a line of argumentation obscures the principle of growth and makes it difficult to explain why Ellen White would take her boys to a phrenologist. I believe we are on much firmer ground simply to recognize that in 1862 she did not yet realize all the implications of phrenology and mesmerism, just as in 1858 she did not realize all the implications of eating pork. But with the passage of time, increased study on her part, and additional revelation, she refined her understanding of the "sciences of the mind." Her final statement is one that we can see as quite appropriate.

5. Science: Astronomy—D. M. Canright again provides insight as to how the popular mind works relative to the issues of revelation and inspiration. After he left Adventism, he adopted a highly critical stance toward the movement, and especially toward Ellen White. One of the chapters in his 1919 book *Life of Mrs. E. G. White* refers to an astronomy vision Ellen White received in 1846. This vision was instrumental in convincing Captain Joseph Bates, a great lover of astronomy, of the validity of Ellen White's prophetic experience.

Canright quotes J. N. Loughborough's version of the event as follows: "One evening, at the conference above mentioned [Topsham, Maine, 1846], in the house of Mr. Curtiss and in the presence of Elder [Captain] Bates, who was yet undecided in regard to these manifestations, Mrs. White, while in vision, began to talk about the stars, giving a glowing description of rosy-tinted belts which she saw across the surface of some planet, and added, 'I see *four moons*.' 'Oh,' said Elder Bates, 'she is viewing *Jupiter*!' Then having made motions as though traveling through space, she began giving a description of belts and rings in their ever-varying beauty, and said, 'I see *seven moons*.' Elder Bates exclaimed, 'She is describing *Saturn*.' Next came the description of *Uranus*, with its *six moons*; then a wonderful description of the 'opening heavens' " (Loughborough, p. 258, cited in Canright, *Life,* p. 277).

While noting that the vision convinced Bates, Canright claims that it could not have come from God, because Mrs. White simply "*saw* what her companions at the time generally believed and talked about," not what was later discovered to be true. His rationale is worth observing: "Had God given her that view about the planets and the number of moons to each, He would have given her the correct number in each case, and thus she would have revealed what astronomers at the time did not know, but later discovered. This would have proved her vision to be of God" (Canright, *Life,* pp. 277, 278).

Canright then quotes scientific authorities available to him in 1919 to

show how many moons the various planets *really* have. What Canright did not recognize was that discoveries have continued to this day.

A random spot check of a number of general reference works reveals how risky it is to hitch the wagon of revelation to the star of science and vice versa. For Jupiter and Saturn, for example, the number of moons changes, depending on the year of publication. The sources cited in the following list are: 1846, Loughborough's version of EGW's vision; 1919, Canright; 1966, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 1977, *World Book Encyclopedia*; 1985, Friedlander, *Astronomy* (Prentice Hall); 1989, *Newsweek* (Sept. 4, 1989, reporting on recent *Voyager* discoveries):

	1846	1919	1966	1977	1985	1989
Jupiter	4	9	12	13, 14	16	16
Saturn	8	10	9(10)	10	17	20

Since science textbooks quickly become outdated (a painful reality on a college campus), an interesting question arises: At what point should revelation agree with science? I am not sure that we should worry much about that question. Revelation deals with practical matters. If, for example, the Lord had shown Ellen White the 16 moons of Jupiter and the 20 moons of Saturn as reported in the 1989 *Newsweek* article (Begley and Hager, pp. 6-12), Joseph Bates likely would have tested the truth by the facts known to him at that time (Jupiter with 4 and Saturn with 8), thus proving the prophet false.

The limitations of time and circumstances, culture and human knowledge, set certain boundaries within which revelation can be effective. If Jesus, God's supreme revelation, took humanity "in order to reach man where he is" (1SM, p. 20), would not the same principle apply to all lesser revelations as well? That means, of course, that while we cannot claim absolute scientific validity for prophetic messages, their practical value is significantly enhanced. Good teaching always involves effective illustrations, illustrations that are concrete, understandable, adapted to the needs of the learner. They point toward the truth but should not be mistaken for the truth itself.

To sum up, I believe that the scientific and historical statements that were "well-known and universally acknowledged" at a particular point in time are precisely the ones that we would expect an inspired writer to "improve" in later editions when new information comes to light. Whether the number of Israelites leaving Egypt in the Exodus or the number of

moons circling around Saturn and Jupiter, we are dealing with "well-known and universally acknowledged" facts, readily accepted on the basis of casual reading because they are so well known and universally acknowledged.

Just as we would not accept the 1846 or 1919 figures today for the moons around Jupiter or Saturn, so we may take a fresh look at the number of people involved in the Exodus, recognizing, of course, that some will fear the slippery slope. But if we can clearly separate the *fact* of the Exodus from the question of how many people were involved, we will be able to retain the essential features of a conservative, biblical faith and at the same time be able to focus more clearly on the essential message of Scripture and its application in the lives of God's people.

But we must take seriously the danger of the slippery slope. Spiritual life can prosper only if we are secure in the knowledge that our faith is safe. In the nineteenth century, hasty reactions to science were proving damaging to faith. Ellen White addressed that very danger. As long as believers retain an all-or-nothing view of documents written by inspired writers, they will be vulnerable to the slippery slope. And let us be candid: there will always be more than enough believers with that tendency. That means we will have to proceed with great caution.

I am convinced, however, that the stable law pyramid of the one, the two, and the ten, with the eternal principles embedded deeply within, should enable Adventists to break the slide and stop the dominoes from falling. Bequeathed to us is an enduring foundation that cannot be shaken. Attempting to add historical details or the passing fads of science to that enduring foundation could actually jeopardize our faith.

The chapter "Mysteries of the Bible," in Ellen White's book *Education*, cautions us against dogmatism when we should stand in awe before our Creator. The following quotation is one that speaks eloquently to the issue and to our condition: "We have no reason to doubt God's Word because we cannot understand the mysteries of His providence. In the natural world we are constantly surrounded with wonders beyond our comprehension. Should we then be surprised to find in the spiritual world also mysteries that we cannot fathom? The difficulty lies solely in the weakness and narrowness of the human mind" (Ed, p. 170).

The slippery slope is a function of our weak and narrow minds. Chapter 21 deals with ways of overcoming its dangers. In that same chapter we address another peril that lurks if we do not make room for the analytical reader, namely, the "Rehoboam principle."

When Israel requested a lessening of the taxes from Solomon's royal successor, Rehoboam, he reacted stubbornly and threatened to make the taxes even heavier. Ellen White's comments in that connection are particularly cogent: "Had Rehoboam and his inexperienced counselors understood the divine will concerning Israel, they would have listened to the request of the people for decided reforms in the administration of the government. But in the hour of opportunity that came to them during the meeting in Shechem, *they failed to reason from cause to effect, and thus forever weakened their influence over a large number of the people*" (PK, p. 90; italics mine).

In my view, failing to reason from cause to effect in the light of the evidence discussed above could forever weaken Ellen White's influence over a large number of the people. I think it would be tragic to hold her prophetic ministry to ransom over the issue of whether or not her statements on science and history are infallible. If we do our homework carefully, we may preserve the authority of the messengers of God without making them prisoners of a particular worldview.

APPENDIX F

Approaches to the Exodus

There are three basic approaches to historical matters mentioned in Scripture:

Rationalist or Naturalist—Scripture is viewed strictly as a human book; but because it is also a religious book, its historical material is highly suspect and, therefore, can only be trusted when externally verified.

Supernaturalist—Scripture is a divine book; although God works through human beings, He fully controls the historical material in Scripture so that Scripture verifies external events, not the other way around.

Incarnational—Scripture blends the human and the divine, and constitutes a reliable guide to the events it narrates. While the weaknesses in the human element may affect some historical details, a believer gives the Bible the benefit of the doubt, trusting the accounts in Scripture unless there is clear evidence to the contrary. (The "evidence to the contrary" is quite likely to be internal evidence from Scripture itself—for instance, from parallel accounts—since external sources are seldom available for much of Scripture.)

The following example from Martin Noth's *History of Israel* illustrates a thoroughgoing rationalist approach to the Exodus from Egypt. Noth rules out the possibility of miraculous intervention and accepts only events described in Scripture as true when they have been confirmed by sources outside Scripture.

The other methodological extreme, represented by the quote from Leon Wood, which follows Noth's paragraph, assumes that Scripture is an

accurate, error-free, and divinely guaranteed history of events. Everything in Scripture—broad stroke as well as fine detail—is accepted as true, regardless of what external evidence may suggest.

The methodological approach (incarnational) adopted by this book stands between those two extremes. It recognizes a role for the human and for the divine. It accepts the miracles of the Bible as true because the Bible reports them. On the one hand, it does not require external proof before accepting the testimony of Scripture. On the other hand, while granting the Bible the full benefit of the doubt, it does not impose the biblical account on external events. An incarnational approach recognizes that the humanity of the inspired writers and the audience to which they speak requires God to accommodate His revelation to both prophet and audience. Thus some "well-known and universally acknowledged" "facts" may be wrong, but cannot be corrected immediately because people can handle only a limited amount of change at any given time.

Therefore, when such culturally conditioned elements are discovered in Scripture, we must handle them carefully lest they be given absolute value on the one hand, or be the cause for loss of faith on the other.

The Rationalist Approach

"It is wrong to ask which of the Israelite tribes were in Egypt since the tribes were only formed into permanent units when they arrived in Palestine. In some cases it can be proved, and it is probably in the others also, that they were first given their names there too. The later tribes did not exist at all in Egypt. This makes the question as to who actually was in Egypt even more difficult to answer; we can only say that they were elements which became part of the tribes which were formed when the land was occupied. They were probably not absorbed by a single tribe, or even a single group of tribes, but by the whole range of the Israelite tribes. It may be surmised that those who migrated to Egypt had previously had a connection with the nomadic shepherds who sojourned on the borders of Palestine, who had perhaps already been in touch with this land in the process of changing pastures, and who, in the course of time, formed the tribes of Israel. After the deliverance out of Egypt, these migrants may well have returned to this sphere again. We have no knowledge whatsoever as to how this came about, since the route taken by the Israelites on their departure from Egypt, which is presupposed rather than actually laid down in the Pentateuch, was based on the later combination of the various themes of the narrative and not on an original tradition. After crossing the

desert of Sinai, the elements which came from Egypt at any rate reached the territory of the clans who were living in the vicinity of Palestine and who coveted this land. They were probably related to these clans and brought them the news of the divine miracle 'by the sea,' which moved them so deeply that they passed the story on everywhere and transmitted it to their descendants as though it had happened to them all. In this way the confession of faith in the God who had manifested Himself so gloriously by delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians became the common property of the whole of Israel and one of the foundations of the faith which was vital in the institution of the sacral confederations of the twelve tribes under the protection of the binding law of God" (Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1965], p. 119).

The Supernaturalist Approach

Contrasting with the stance of Noth is that of Leon Wood, an evangelical author. In the quotations below, note how Wood grapples with the rational difficulties posed by the apparent conclusion, based on statements in Scripture, that 2 million people left Egypt. His preference for inerrancy, however, finally overcomes his rational objections.

"This repetition of the 600,000 figure, in different contexts, is clear evidence that it is not a copyist error as liberal writers so often assert. This number is very large, and certainly immense problems existed in view of it for the wilderness journey. But it must be accepted in view of the evidence. God, working through Moses, was able to work out the problems" (*A Survey of Israel's History* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970], p. 131 [footnote]).

Given Wood's conviction that 2 million people were involved, he concludes that the path through the sea must have been at least a mile wide since all the Israelites had to pass through in the course of one night. The accompanying footnote indicates the kind of struggle that ensues when the natural seems to clash with the dictates of the supernatural text: "A marching line of 2,000,000 people, walking ten abreast with an average five feet separating each rank, would be 190 miles long. Had this path been only as wide as a modern highway, the first Israelites through would have been in Canaan before the last started, and several days would have elapsed" (Wood, p. 133 [footnote]).

The Incarnational Approach

An incarnational model allows for human imperfections in the lesser matters, arguing, for example, that the *fact* of the Exodus is clear, but that the *number* which went out certainly is not.

As discussed in Chapter 19, another possibility exists for addressing the problem of numbers in the Old Testament, namely, the ambiguity in the meaning of the Hebrew word for "thousand" (i.e., thousand or clan or chieftain).

Philosophically, the two extreme positions are much tidier than the incarnational model; either the book is human or it is divine. But the incarnational model allows us to take seriously the text of Scripture, the external evidence, and the needs of the Christian experience. And because the text, not some philosophical *a priori*, defines the model, the interpreter can afford to be fair to the text, to external evidence, and to religious experience.

APPENDIX G

Disagreement: Fruitful or Destructive?

Significant Ellen White Statements

1. **CONSERVATISM:** Failure to investigate Scripture leads to conservatism and the avoidance of discussion (5T, pp. 706, 707).

2. **DISAGREEING WITH A PROPHET:** Ellen White disagrees with E. J. Waggoner's interpretation of Scripture, yet still considers him a full brother in the faith and states that his message "harmonizes fully" with that which the Lord had given her over the years (MS 15, 1888).

3. **DIVERSITY:** Just as the diversity in Scripture corresponds to the diversity among human beings, so students will profit by having more than one Bible teacher (CT, pp. 432, 433).

4. **UNITY:** A common view of every Scripture is not necessary for the unity of the church (MS 24, 1892).

1. CONSERVATISM

Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to

advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word and discourage any further investigation of the Scriptures. They become conservative and seek to avoid discussion.

The fact that there is no controversy or agitation among God's people should not be regarded as conclusive evidence that they are holding fast to sound doctrine. There is reason to fear that they may not be clearly discriminating between truth and error. When no new questions are started by investigation of the Scriptures, when no difference of opinion arises which will set men to searching the Bible for themselves to make sure that they have the truth, there will be many now, as in ancient times, who will hold to tradition and worship they know not what (5T, pp. 706, 707).

2. DISAGREEING WITH A PROPHET
"A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word"
November 1, 1888, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dear Brethren Assembled at General Conference:

I entreat you to exercise the spirit of Christians. Do not let strong feelings of prejudice arise, for we should be prepared to investigate the Scripture with unbiased minds, with reverence and candor. It becomes us to pray over matters of difference in views of Scripture. Personal feelings should not be allowed to influence our words or our judgment. It will grieve the Spirit of God if you close your understanding to the light which God sends you.

Dr. Waggoner has spoken to us in a straightforward manner. There is precious light in what he has said. Some things presented in reference to the law in Galatians, if I fully understand his position, do not harmonize with the understanding I have had of this subject; but truth will lose nothing by investigation, therefore I plead for Christ's sake that you come to the living Oracles, and with prayer and humiliation seek God. Everyone should feel that he has the privilege of searching the Scriptures for himself, and he should do this with earnest prayer that God will give him a right understanding of His Word, that he may know from positive evidence that he does know what is truth.

I would have humility of mind, and be willing to be instructed as a child. The Lord has been pleased to give me great light, yet I know that He leads other minds, and opens to them the mysteries of His Word, and I want to receive every ray of light that God shall send me, though it should

come through the humblest of His servants.

Of one thing I am certain, as Christians you have no right to entertain feelings of enmity, unkindness, and prejudice toward Dr. Waggoner, who has presented his views in a plain, straightforward manner, as a Christian should. If he is in error, you should, in a calm, rational, [pp. 303/304] Christlike manner, seek to show him from the Word of God where he is out of harmony with its teachings. If you cannot do this you have no right as Christians to pick flaws, to criticize, to work in the dark, to prejudice minds with your objections. This is Satan's way of working.

Some interpretations of Scripture given by Dr. Waggoner I do not regard as correct. But I believe him to be perfectly honest in his views, and I would respect his feelings and treat him as a Christian gentleman. I have no reason to think that he is not as much esteemed of God as are any of my brethren, and I shall regard him as a Christian brother, so long as there is no evidence that he is unworthy. The fact that he honestly holds some views of Scripture differing from yours or mine is no reason why we should treat him as an offender, or as a dangerous man, and make him the subject of unjust criticism. We should not raise a voice of censure against him or his teachings unless we can present weighty reasons for so doing and show him that he is in error. No one should feel at liberty to give loose reign to the combative spirit.

There are some who desire to have a decision made at once as to what is the correct view on the point under discussion. As this would please Elder B., it is advised that this question be settled at once. But are minds prepared for such a decision? I could not sanction this course, because our brethren are exercised by a spirit which moves their feelings, and stirs their impulses, so as to control their judgment. While under so much excitement as now exists, they are not prepared to make safe decisions.

I know it would be dangerous to denounce Dr. Waggoner's position as wholly erroneous. This would please the enemy. I see the beauty of truth in the presentation of the righteousness of Christ in relation to the law as the doctor has placed it before us. You say, many of you, it is light and truth. Yet you have not presented it in this light heretofore. Is it not possible that through earnest, prayerful searching of the Scriptures he has seen still greater light on some points? That which has been presented harmonizes perfectly with the light which God has been pleased to give me during all the years of my experience. If our ministering brethren would accept the doctrine which has been presented so clearly—the righteousness of Christ in connection with the law—and I know they need to accept

this, their prejudices would not have a controlling power, and the people would be fed with their portion of meat in due season. Let us take our Bibles, and with humble prayer and a teachable spirit, come to the great Teacher of the world; let us pray as did David, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18).

I see no excuse for the wrought-up state of feeling that has been created at this meeting. This is the first time I have had opportunity to listen to anything in reference to this subject. I have had no conversation [pp. 304/305] in regard to it with my son W. C. White, with Dr. Waggoner, or with Elder A. T. Jones. At this meeting I have heard for the first time Dr. Waggoner's reasons for his position. The messages coming from your president at Battle Creek are calculated to stir you up to make hasty decisions and to take decided positions; but I warn you against doing this. You are not now calm; there are many who do not know what they believe. It is perilous to make decisions upon any controverted point without dispassionately considering all sides of the question. Excited feelings will lead to rash movements. It is certain that many have come to this meeting with false impressions and perverted opinions. They have imaginings that have no foundation in truth. Even if the position which we have held upon the two laws is truth, the Spirit of truth will not countenance any such measures to defend it as many of you would take. The spirit that attends the truth should be such as will represent the Author of truth (MS 15, 1888 [excerpt, Olson, 1981, pp. 303-305]).

3. DIVERSITY
"The Bible Teacher" (excerpt)

In our schools the work of teaching the Scriptures to the youth is not to be left wholly with one teacher for a long series of years. The Bible teacher may be well able to present the truth, and yet it is not the best experience for the students that their study of the Word of God should be directed by one man only, term after term and year after year. Different teachers should have a part in the work, even though they may not all have so full an understanding of the Scriptures. If several in our larger schools unite in the work of teaching the Scriptures, the students may thus have the benefit of the talents of several.

Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul, and all the writers who have borne testimony in regard to the life and ministry of the Saviour? Why could not one of the disciples have written a complete

record, and thus have given us a connected account of Christ's earthly life? Why does one writer bring in points that another does not mention? Why, if these points are essential, did not all these writers mention them? It is because the minds of men differ. Not all comprehend things in exactly the same way. Certain truths appeal much more strongly to the minds of some than of others.

The same principle applies to speakers. One dwells at considerable length on points that others would pass by quickly or not mention at all. The whole truth is presented more clearly by several than by one. The Gospels differ, but the records of all blend in one harmonious whole.

So today the Lord does not impress all minds in the same way. Often through unusual experiences, under special circumstances, He gives to some Bible students views of truth that others do not grasp. It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of teaching all that should be taught.

It would greatly benefit our schools if regular meetings were held frequently in which all the teachers could unite in the study of the Word of God. They should search the Scriptures as did the noble Bereans. They should subordinate all preconceived opinions, and taking the Bible as their lesson Book, comparing Scripture with Scripture, they should learn what to teach their students, and how to train them for acceptable service.

The teachers' success will depend largely upon the spirit which is brought into the work. . . . Let not the spirit of controversy come in, but let each seek earnestly for the light and knowledge that he needs (CT, pp. 432, 433).

4. UNITY

Christ prayed that His disciples might be one even as He and His Father are one. In what does this unity consist? This oneness does not exist because everyone has the same disposition, the same temperament, and thinks in the very same channel. All do not possess the same degree of intelligence. All have not the same experience. In a church there are different gifts and varied experiences. In temporal matters there are a great variety of ways of management, and yet these variations in manner of labor, in the exercise of gifts, do not create dissension, discord, and disunion.

One man may be conversant with the Scriptures, and some particular portion of the Scripture may be especially appreciated by him; another sees another portion as very important, and thus one may present one

point, and another, another point, and both may be of highest value. This is all in the order of God. But if a man makes a mistake in his interpretation of some portion of the Scripture, shall this cause diversity and disunion? God forbid. We cannot then take a position that the unity of the church consists in viewing every text of Scripture in the very same light. The church may pass resolution upon resolution to put down all disagreement of opinions, but we cannot force the mind and will, and root out disagreement. These resolutions may conceal the discord, but they cannot quench it and establish perfect agreement. Nothing can perfect unity in the church but the spirit of Christlike forbearance. Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ's school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls.

The great truths of the Word of God are so clearly stated that none need make a mistake in understanding them. When as individual members of the church, you love God supremely and your neighbor as yourself, there will be no need of labored efforts to be in unity, for there will be oneness in Christ as a natural result (excerpt, MS 24, 1892 [MS Release #898]).

▼

An Autobiographical Bibliographical Note

An Apology

The autobiographical element in the body of this book invites a similar touch relative to sources and bibliography. Like Tertius, who tucked in his own word at the end of Paul's book (Rom. 16:22), I, too, cannot resist a final word of my own, even if it is for my own book.

The formal reason for this personal note is to offer an apology (in both senses of the word) for the absence of a comprehensive list of sources "for further study." And if I am going to be as personal as I want to be in conjunction with what is typically the most impersonal and technical part of a book, the references and bibliography, an explanation is almost mandatory.

In the first instance my "apology" will be self-confident and bold, reflecting the more classical use of the word *apology* as a "defense" or "justification": I have done what I have done deliberately and with intention. But my "apology" also slips over to its more popular usage as an "expression of regret" or even "excuse." Admittedly, the absence of a comprehensive or even a "select" list of sources could appear simply as a significant weakness, for as more informed readers know all too well, each chapter is but a tiny mustard seed compared with its potential for growth. A list of the right sources could encourage that essential growth. I will want to say more about that. . . .

But let me be self-confident and bold first, for I also believe that the absence of such a list could be a strength, *if* the present shape of the book encourages readers first and foremost to bring their own experience into an active dialogue with Scripture itself. For my part, I was markedly

influenced by J. Paul Grove's method of teaching while I was in college. Over the years I have become increasingly grateful. He asked us to read Scripture. So we read Matthew. No commentaries. Not even *Desire of Ages*. Gradually we began to hear Matthew's own voice emerge. It was exciting. While I now use commentaries and often find them immensely helpful, I know that reading the Bible without them as a first step has real advantages.

In the college course that shaped much of this material, the primary assignments I gave my students required them to read the Bible, not books about the Bible. Both can be helpful—this book in your hand is not the Bible, it is about the Bible. But books about the Bible should entice God's people back to Scripture, especially if Scripture is as important as we have claimed it to be.

During my year as an exchange teacher at Marienhoehe Seminary in Germany, I watched with uneasy interest as gifted ministerial students gravitated to the sophisticated and complex secondary literature as the basis for their study. They did not trust their own ability to read and apply Scripture, preferring to rely on famous authorities. Thus, as I learned through a number of conversations, they often experienced enormous frustration upon entering the ministry, for their learning was in a world apart from that of the believers. They did not know how to lead the believers to a practical understanding and application of Scripture. As a result, some simply jettisoned their education and reverted to their preseminary experience. Others, including some of the most gifted, simply abandoned the ministry and sometimes the church.

So I began developing assignments that not only would lead the students into Scripture, but also would make the use of other sources almost impossible at the early stages. They were very uneasy at the prospect of submitting papers with no authorities cited. But I reassured them that I wanted them to deal with Scripture. My German students from that year will remember the twinkle in my eye and the *Sprichwort* (proverb) I began to use with increasing frequency: "*Die Bibel ist* auch *ein gutes Buch*" ("The Bible is *also* a good book"). And their uneasiness ebbed away as they began to experience some of the practical benefits of reading Scripture for themselves. I vividly remember the excited response from one of the brightest students, one who had been more troubled than most about the lack of authorities to back up his position: "I can begin to see," he said, "how a pastor could make the study of the Bible interesting and practical for the church members."

I almost thought I heard a fervent "Amen!" from Ellen White: "We are not to accept the opinion of commentators as the voice of God; they were erring mortals like ourselves. God has given reasoning powers to us as well as to them. We should make the Bible its own expositor" (TM, p. 106).

Of what value, then, are the secondary sources? Much. In the first instance, they can provide us with additional valuable facts and information. But even more, a secondary source reveals *how another person has interpreted and experienced the facts*. In a sense, a secondary source becomes another primary source, but from quite a different perspective, that of experience. Our ability to understand that experiential perspective not only will help us interpret Scripture, it also will help us fulfill our global mission. The more "experiences" we understand, the more effective we will be in sharing the gospel with the Greeks, the barbarians, the wise, and the foolish (Rom. 1:14).

Ellen White expressed a similar concern when she urged that the students in our schools be granted the privilege of studying under more than one Bible teacher. Interestingly enough, she based her argument on the *diversity* of the authors in Scripture: "Why do we need a Matthew, a Mark, a Luke, a John, a Paul?" she asks. "Because the minds of men differ" (CT, p. 432). "It is possible for the most learned teacher to fall far short of all that should be taught" (CT, p. 433).

In that same connection, I have a practical suggestion for the use of secondary sources in the study of Scripture. In short, I find it helpful to seek assistance from both "left" and "right"—from a "liberal" source, one more inclined to look at the human aspects of Scripture, and from a "conservative" source, one more likely to emphasize the divine. The "critic" on the left sometimes proffers a more honest analysis than the defender of the faith is likely to admit. Conversely, the "believer" on the right sometimes suggests solutions that are more satisfactory than the "critic" might allow. Thus, when it comes to Bible dictionaries, for example, I find it helpful to study with *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (IDB) or *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (HBD) in the left hand and *The New Bible Dictionary* (NBD) or *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (SDABD) in the right. Remembering the bias of each source helps guard against overly pessimistic analysis or overly optimistic synthesis. All of which brings us closer to Jesus' goal for us: "And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32, RSV).

There is another reason why I have reduced to a bare minimum references to secondary sources, and that has to do with the way many

devout believers respond to "nonbiblical" material. Years of polemic have conditioned us to reject out of hand those troublesome observations that come from "liberal" sources, even though the evidence may be painfully clear in Scripture. The problem has been that if a believer should be so bold as to cite that troublesome evidence, his or her status within the believing community is often at risk, for that evidence is viewed as the enemy's ammunition. And should said bold believer then be ousted from the community, boldness can turn to bitterness. As a result, the evidence is cited with increasing rancor. But the members of the community who ousted the "heretic" now feel no obligation to deal with the evidence since the erstwhile "believer" has become an outsider anyway.

The traditional view of inspiration with its inclination toward inerrancy has meant that the evidence against inerrancy *from within Scripture* is cited primarily by the "liberals." In this book, I have sought to show how Ellen White carefully occupies that dangerous middle ground. She saw the human in Scripture, but still believed and still experienced its power as the Word of God. Because of my trust in Ellen White, and because of the role she plays in Adventism, my argument has been: If she can see the evidence and still believe, so can I. And so can you.

And thus we come to a day of opportunity for Adventists. By God's grace, we can begin to occupy that middle ground with confidence. We can present an incarnational model of inspiration, one that allows us to worship God wholeheartedly and to love one another sincerely—and precisely because we have taken *all* of Scripture into account, *omnis Scriptura* (2 Tim. 3:16).

I know that not all "liberals" are as evil as "conservatives" have made them out to be. Many of them simply have been "driven to skepticism" by the "errors of popular theology," to borrow phrases from Ellen White (GC, p. 525). At the same time, many "conservatives" are not nearly so close-minded as the "liberals" have made them out to be. They simply cherish their relationship with God too much to see the Bible being handled as a mere human book. Is there a common ground upon which both can meet?

I believe there is. And some of the reviews of my *Who's Afraid of the Old Testament God?* are quite revealing in that respect. The underlying approach in *Who's Afraid?* is similar to the one developed in this volume, though not as explicit in some respects. I do, however, openly state my conservative stance, suggesting "that we simply accept the scheme of 'history' which the Old Testament itself suggests." And in so doing, I note

that my approach runs "the risk of sounding terribly conservative to some of my scholarly friends and dangerously liberal to my conservative friends" (Thompson, *Who's Afraid?*, p. 28). To be sure, some reviewers did not see the common ground. Richard Coggins, in *Theological Book Review* (1:3 [May, 1989], p. 6), said it would "attract some; others, especially those of less conservative persuasion, may find their difficulties compounded." In a personal letter to me (May 2, 1990), C. S. Rodd, editor of *Expository Times*, observed: "You are too honest for some. On the other hand, you are too intent on salvaging the OT for others." But Joseph Robinson, reviewing the book in *Church Times* (April 28, 1989, p. 6), while noting that for me "conservative . . . seems to describe those who accept a near-fundamentalist view of the authority and inspiration of the scriptures," went on to describe what I had hoped some reviewer would note: "In the end Mr. Thompson's conservatism seems to end up in much the same place as the liberals." Marvelous. Proverbs and Ecclesiastes side by side, just as they are in Scripture. The difference is, of course, that these "liberals" and "conservatives" are wholehearted in their worship of God and in their reverence for Scripture. And in Christ, they are seriously seeking to understand each other. That is a formula for a world church, a global strategy, one that seeks to meet the needs of Greeks, barbarians, wise, and foolish (Rom. 1:14).

Quite deliberately, I made almost no reference to secondary literature in *Who's Afraid?* And for at least one Adventist pastor, that was good news. He wrote: "What especially fascinated me was that you didn't use footnotes. You used Bible-based logic alone. That's refreshing."

So, at certain points, at least, there may be distinct advantages in keeping the secondary literature mostly under wraps. But that now brings me to the less self-confident part of my apology, indeed, to an apology tinged with regret and filled with excuses—almost reflecting a certain dejection on my part. For I really believe it would be possible to shape this book in such a way as to lead the believer into Scripture *and* to provide the sources for additional study. It would be a better book. It would be a good book. But I have not taken the time. And I am not ready. Why?

For a book like this book to appear, someone has to be ready to write it, a press has to be ready to publish it, and in the collective thinking of responsible Christians, the church has to be judged ready to receive it. I would like to believe that the time has come. But until the kingdom, can we ever know for sure in such matters? Given the potentially volatile nature of this book, I can couch my own uncertainty in terms of two

contrasting statements from Ellen White. On the side of caution stands a good "health reform" quote: "We must go no faster than we can take those with us whose consciences and intellects are convinced of the truths we advocate. We must meet the people where they are. Some of us have been many years in arriving at our present position. . . . If we should allow the people as much time as we have required to come up to the present advanced state . . . we would be very patient with them, and allow them to advance step by step, as we have done . . . But we should be very cautious not to advance too fast, lest we be obliged to retrace our steps. In reforms we would better come one step short of the mark than to go one step beyond it. If there is error at all, let it be on the side next to the people" (3T, pp. 20, 21). Because I love my church, I want to err on the side next to the people.

But on the side of all due haste, I ponder her criticisms of an earlier Adventist scholar, J. N. Andrews and his *History of the Sabbath*. "I saw . . . that he delayed the work too long. Other erroneous works were taking the field and blocking the way, so that minds would be prejudiced by the opposing elements. I saw that thus much would be lost. After the first edition was exhausted, then he could make improvements; but he was seeking too hard to arrive at perfection. This delay was not as God would have it" (3SM, p. 97).

And so I have written.

But if Adventist scholars are to serve the church well, we must be in touch both with the church and with the larger world of scholarship. For the sake of all Adventist scholars who have dedicated their lives to serving the church, I hope my church will sense our pain—yes, and our feelings of guilt—when we expend such extensive energies on the church side of our work that we fall short of our ideal on the scholarly side. For me, that ideal finds unforgettable expression in Ellen White's characterization of John Wycliffe: "Wycliffe received a liberal education, and with him the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom. He was noted at college for his fervent piety as well as for his remarkable talents and sound scholarship. In his thirst for knowledge he sought to become acquainted with every branch of learning. He was educated in the scholastic philosophy, in the canons of the church, and in the civil law, especially that of his own country. In his after labors the value of this early training was apparent. A thorough acquaintance with the speculative philosophy of his time enabled him to expose its errors; and by his study of national and ecclesiastical law he was prepared to engage in the great struggle for civil

and religious liberty. While he could wield the weapons drawn from the word of God, he had acquired the intellectual discipline of the schools, and he understood the tactics of the schoolmen. The power of his genius and the extent and thoroughness of his knowledge commanded the respect of both friends and foes. His adherents saw with satisfaction that their champion stood foremost among the leading minds of the nation; and his enemies were prevented from casting contempt upon the cause of reform by exposing the ignorance or weakness of its supporter" (GC, p. 80).

To develop and maintain competence in the scholarly world while maintaining the confidence of the believers, as Wycliffe did, is a daunting task. But for Adventist scholars to walk in Wycliffe's steps, the Adventist community must value the kind of work Wycliffe did. That means a serious interest both in the study of Scripture and in intellectual development. If the church neglects either, both the church and its scholars are at risk.

Without being unduly critical of my church, I must say that our commitment both to the study of Scripture and to intellectual development is in urgent need of renewal. And the two are closely linked. Adventism is a growing, dynamic, international movement. The church faces enormous challenges. But working together as a community to meet those challenges is part of the excitement of belonging.

Putting all the pieces together, however, yields a picture of a church that is more active than thoughtful. There are telltale signs that even our commitment to Scripture has become dangerously superficial. In Richard Schwarz's denominational history textbook, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (1979), for example, the final chapter is entitled "Still a Bible-oriented Church." While the chapter discusses the Bible Conferences of 1952 and 1974 (with a quick backward glance to the one in 1919), nothing is said about either the seven-volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (1953-1957) or the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (1960, 1979). The omissions are unfortunate, but may very well reflect the attitude toward Scripture that has been developing in Adventism: periodic and public affirmation that the Bible is indeed important, but no corresponding emphasis on the serious study of the Word. The seminar topics presented during the General Conference ministerial presessions could be seen as further symptoms of the same disease, especially if they are a reflection of ministerial interests, for in the past two General Conferences together (1985, 1990) only one of more than 70 seminars focused directly on the exposition of Scripture.

While there are encouraging signs of a renewed commitment to

matters biblical and intellectual in the church, we also must recognize the dilemma faced by Adventist publishers, a dilemma as frightening (and as expensive!) as that faced by the scholarly community. For if many thoughtful readers have given up on the Adventist Book Center, how can the church entice them back to buy the brave, new books that are the answer to their prayers? It is a vicious cycle that must be addressed at several levels in the church.

Serious books, even very readable ones, often do not receive the visibility they deserve in the church. Schwarz's *Light Bearers*, for example, published in 1979, represented a major effort by the church to provide a credible denominational history textbook. Yet the book received no mention whatsoever at the 1980 General Conference, ironically suffering the same fate as the SDABC and SDABD had in *Light Bearers* itself. More recently, the *Adventist Review* (Nov. 22, 1990) announced that the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Librarians (ASDAL) had given one of its first annual Literary Awards to Jon Dybdahl for *Missions: A Two-Way Street* (Pacific Press, 1986). The book is a delightful and stimulating presentation of the effect of culture on our Christian witness and mission. Hopefully the award did not come too late to rescue the book from an early demise, for it was already on the Adventist Book Center discount table in the Spring of 1990.

Apart from the general tendency of our age to prefer activity to thought, are there other reasons why Adventists neglect Scripture? My fourth-generation Adventist perspective tells me that fear is one of the chief reasons. In 1952, the editor-in-chief of the forthcoming SDABC, F. D. Nichol, spoke of the modern "attack" on Scripture that was leaving some Adventist ministers "a little panic-stricken at times" (Schwarz, p. 615). Indeed. And some of the biblical material presented in this book, even though perfectly clear to the unbiased eye, has contributed to that panic in the past, for it did not fit the traditional model of how inspiration was supposed to have operated.

Do we need to be afraid? Not if we let the Bible—all the Bible (*omnis Scriptura*!)—determine our theory of inspiration rather than bringing a predetermined view of inspiration to the Bible. In this book, I have proposed a model that I believe is capable of encompassing all Scripture. Until we have such a model in hand, many will find it easier to defend the Bible than to study it, and our study may very well be threatened by "panic," to borrow Nichol's word.

The development of such a model and finding ways of sharing it with

the church has been almost a passion with me. That vision of Wycliffe, the master of Scripture *and* the broader intellectual world has been a driving force. And several key experiences have marked the progress toward my present position. The pieces have fallen together gradually. In the early 1970s, studying the Old Testament in Scotland opened my eyes to the way God works within varied cultures. How could I share those insights with my church? Only by knowing my own heritage. So in the late 1970s I focused my attention on the history of Adventism and on the experience of Ellen White. Carefully reading through the *Testimonies*, I correlated the development of her Christian experience with the development of her theology. A year as an exchange teacher in Germany (1980-81) heightened my sensitivity to the interplay between culture and temperament. I can now process those seminal experiences in a variety of ways because of the varied roles I have played as husband, father, pastor, teacher, and college administrator. Each role provides a different perspective for observing how people respond to authority and to other people. In sum, I am convinced that the variety in Scripture is the key to its unity and to the unity of the church.

If the model proposed in this book can provide a common ground on which all Adventists can stand, our energies can be directed more toward understanding each other and loving the world (in the right sense) and less toward fighting each other and running away from the world. Then future works on inspiration and on Scripture can be greatly enhanced with significant sources from Adventist authors—the liberated Wycliffes among us—as well as from the larger world of scholarship. Adventists will be a more buoyant and self-confident community, for our faith will not be embarrassed by hard questions, and our intellectual integrity will not be compromised by our wholehearted confession of faith in our Creator and Redeemer.

▼

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Note: The following is a list of sources cited. It is not intended as a guide to sources consulted or as a suggested reading list. Sources included in the list of abbreviations on page 7 are not repeated here. A number of the more significant quotations and discussions may be located under the author's name and/or publication as listed in the general index. Abbreviations used in citing the writings of Ellen White are listed on page 7.

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INDICES

Index 1: Biblical Passages Cited
Index 2: Ellen G. White References Cited
Index 3: General

Note: Page references for the more pointed or extended discussions are italicized. Major discussions of biblical passages are only rarely cited in the general index. Some Ellen White quotations are cited in the general index to aid the reader who remembers the point of a quotation but not the reference.

INDEX 1: BIBLICAL PASSAGES CITED

GENESIS

1 283
2-3 283
3-11 178
3 ..... 178, 181-82
3:1 181
4:8 178
4:23-24 178
5 ..... *226-31*
6:1-8:19 178
9:20-27 178
11 ..... *226-31*
11:1-9 178
12:4 233
15:13-16 ..... *214-36,* 232-33
17:9-14 143
21:5 233
22 178
25:26 233
47:9 233

EXODUS

1:15 221-22
1:19 117
2:1 223
2:11-15 ..... *205-213, 208-211,* 210
3-4 210
3:13-15 ..... *280-84*
4:13-16 161
4:22-24 177
6:2-6 283
6:2 218
11:4 177
12:12-13, 23, 27, 29 177
12:37 218
12:40 ..... *233,* 235
14:4 179
14:21 61
14:30-31 179
15:8 61
15:20 218
20:3 ..... 179, 279
21:1-6 99
21:7-11 99
21:12-14 117
21:15-17 117
21:17 122
22:2-3 117
22:18 122
22:20 122
23:19 127
25:9 202
38:26 218

LEVITICUS

11 127
16 182
17:10-16 127
18:16 101
19:18 ..... 115, 116, 131

NUMBERS

1:2 174
1:45-46 ....*214-36,* 215
1:46 ....218, 285
2:32 218
3:27-28 ....*214-36,* 215-16, 218
3:43 ....*214-36,* 215, 218
11:21 218
21:6 ....177, 183
21:8-9 182
23-24 51
26:51 218
35:9-28 ....99, 117

DEUTERONOMY

4:2 78
4:8 120
6:4-5 ....115, 116, 131
6:6-7 18
7:1, 7, 22 222
12:32 78
14 127
14:21 127
18:9-14 179
18:14 179
19:19 117
20:10-18 117
23 123-24
23:1 123
23:2 124
23:3 ....124, 230
23:24 122
24:5 122
25:5-10 101
29:26 279-80
32:8-9 280

JOSHUA

24:2 ....119, 178, 227

JUDGES

3-16 234
11:1-29 124
11:24 280

RUTH

4:10-17 124

1 SAMUEL

5:1-5 280
16:1-3 117

2 SAMUEL

16-17 117
24 ....13-14, *173-83,* 183
24:1 173-74
24:9 174
24:16 174
24:24 174

1 KINGS

6:1 ....*232-35*
11:14 180
11:23, 25 180
11:41 ....48, *157-59*
12 241
18:21 280
22 197-98
22:19-23 ....*196-204*

2 KINGS

3:27 280
5:15-19 280
17 226
24:18-25:30 169

1 CHRONICLES

2:1-20 ....*214-36,* 232
3:10-11 216
3:11-12 216
6:1-3 ....*214-36,* 215, 232-33
7:23-27 ....*214-36,* 215, 216, 232
21 ....13-14, *173-83,* 180, 183
21:1 173
21:5 174
21:15 174
21:25 174
29:10-11 71
29:29 ....48, *157-59*

2 CHRONICLES

9:29 ....*157-59*
24:20 225
30 185
35 185

EZRA

4 ....63, 226
8:21-23 103

NEHEMIAH

2:7-9 103
13:23, 25 124-25

JOB

1-2 ....177, *181*
2:3 181
9:20-22 ....*154-56*
19:6-7 155
42:6 155
42:7-9 155
42:7-8 155-56

PSALMS

8 225
8:5-6 78
14 283
17:1-5 ....*151-53*
22:1-2 ....*151-53*
53 283
119:18 306
137:7-9 ....*151-53*
144:14 223

PROVERBS

1:1 ....*163-72,* 163, *167-68*
2:21-22 ....*154-56*
10:1 ....*163-72,* 163, *167-68*
22:6 249
22:17-23:11 168
25:1 ....*163-72,* 163, *167-68*
26:4-5 101
30:1 ....*163-72,* 163, *167-68*
31:1 ....*163-72,* 163, *167-68*

ECCLESIASTES

7:15-17 ....*154-56*

ISAIAH

6:5 25
7:14 78
8:20 ....32, 122, 148
14:4 182
14:12-15 182
37:5-7 102
45:6-7 180
56:3-5 123
65-66 255-57
66:24 199

JEREMIAH

1:1-5 ....*163-72,* 164, *168-71*
1:1-4 168-69
13:21 223
20:9 53
21-29 ....*171*
21:9 102
25:13 171

29 169
29:1 ....*163-72*, 164, *168-71*
31:34 ....115, 119
36 169
36:4 ....*160-62*
36:17-18 ....*160-62*
36:32 ....*163-72*, 164, *168-71*
46-51 ....*171*
51:64-52:1 ....*163-72*, 164, *168-71*, 169

LAMENTATIONS

3:22-23 264

EZEKIEL

28:11-19 182
28:11 182

DANIEL

5 231
5:2 231
8:14 85
10:17, 19 50

HOSEA

11:1-3 ....*205-213*
11:1 206

JOEL

2:29 33

MICAH

4:5 280
5:2 ....223 (4x)

ZECHARIAH

3 ....177, 180
11:12-13 225
14 255-57

MATTHEW

1 ....*230*
1:1-17 ....*214-36*, 216-17
1:5-6, 16 124-25
1:22-23 206
2:6 223
2:14-15 ....*205-213*
2:15 206
2:15, 17, 18, 23 206
4 190-91
4:14-16 206
5:18 78
5:21-22 117
5:27-28 117
5:31-32 292
5:43-44 ....*151-53*
6:9-13 ....71, 84
7:12 ....115, 116, 131
8:17 206
9:27 231
12:17-21 206
13:14-15, 35 206
14:3-4 101
17:14-21 ....*187-95*, 188, *191-93*
19:3-9 121
19:8 ....115, 121
19:16-21 ....115, 131
21:4-5 206
22:23-33 101
22:35-40 ....115, 131-32
22:37-40 116
23:23 116
23:35 225
26:34 ....*187-95*
27:9-10 ....206, 225
27:37 ....*187-95*
28:20 33

MARK

9:14-29 ..*187-95*, 188-89, *191-93*
9:48 199
10:1-12 121
10:17-21 ....115, 132
12:28-31 ....115, 132
13:22 35
14:30 ....*187-95*
15:26 ....*187-95*

LUKE

1:1-4 ....48, *157-59*
3 ....216-17, *230*
3:36 227
4 190-91
9:37-43 ....*187-95*, 188, *191-93*
10:25-28 ....115, 132
10:27 136
11:2-4 71
18:8 ....23, 25
18:9-14 ....*151-53*
18:18-22 ....115, 132
21:38 72
22:34 ....*187-95*
22:35-38 102
23:34 ....*151-53*
23:38 ....*187-95*
24:44 ....63, 205, 207

JOHN

1:14 31
2:4 291
3:16 ....59, 240
7:53-8:11 ....*71-73*, 84
8:32 311
11:50-51 51
13:34-35 ....115, 132-33
13:38 ....*187-95*
14:15 ....115, 133
14:21 ....115, 133
14:26 33
15:10 ....115, 133
15:12 ....115, 133
15:17 ....115, 133
16:13 33
19:19 ....*187-95*

ACTS

2:38-39 33
7:24-51 ..*205-213*, *208-211*, 210
15 ....100, 122, 127, 143, *147-50*
15:10 ....120, 123, 248
15:20 148
15:28-29 147
15:28 148
15:29 148
16:3 ....147, 149
16:4 149

ROMANS

1:14 ....143, 311, 313
7 120
13:8-10 ....115, 116, 133
13:10 261
16:22 ....*160-62*, 309

1 CORINTHIANS

1:11 48
1:11-12 ....*157-59*
1:14-18 161-62
1:14-16 225
2:9 203
7:1-16 104
8 149-50
8:5-6 280
9:22 ....144, 261
10 149-50
10:23-29 ....*147-48*
10:27 128
10:31-33 150
13 ....82, 115, 133
16:21 ....*160-62*

2 CORINTHIANS

5:17 252

GALATIANS

2:20 122
3 ....97, 212, 286, *304-306*
3:17 ....233, 235, 285
5:13-14 ....115, 133
6:11 ....*160-62*

EPHESIANS

1:17-19 33
4:12-13 33

PHILIPPIANS

3:8-10 259

COLOSSIANS

1:23 247

2 THESSALONIANS

2:9 34

1 TIMOTHY

1:4 221
2:11-15 98

2 TIMOTHY

3:16-17 ....31-32, 50
3:16 ....30, 50, 51-52, 261, 264, 312

TITUS

3:9 221

HEBREWS

2:6 225
4:12 15
8:5 202
10:25 244
11:10 259
11:23-28 ....*205-213, 208-211,* 210

JAMES

1:5-8 ....*151-53*
2:8-12 ....115, 133-34

2 PETER

1:20-21 ....*163-172,* 163, 164, 167, 172
1:21 30
3:14 34

1 JOHN

1:8-10 ....*151-53*
2:3-11 ....115, 134
3:10-18 ....115, 134
3:11 140
3:14-15 ....*151-53*
3:23 ....115, 134
4:1 32
4:7-12 ....115, 134-35
4:16-21 ....115, 135
5:1-3 ....115, 135
5:7-8 ....73-74, 81, 84

2 JOHN

5-6 ....115, 135

REVELATION

1 197-98
1:12-16 ....*196-204*
12:9 182
12:12 34
20 198-99
20:10 198
20:11-15 ....*196-204,* 197
20:14 198
21-22 ....199, 255-56
22:18-19 78

INDEX 2: ELLEN G. WHITE REFERENCES CITED

See List of Abreviations, p. 12.

CT

432-33 .....44-45, *306-307*
432.....263, 311
433.....250, 259, 263, 311

CWE

37.....97, 140, 261
40.....145

DA

146 291
638 59

Ed

133.....140, 259
159 181
170 297
171-72.....252
172 141
192 259

EW

255.....202-203
294-95.....198-99

GC

v-xii 16-18, *30-36*, 52, 146, 166, 250, 253-59
vi-vii 158
vi 54, 153
vii.....87-88, 262
viii 62
xi-xii.....*287-89*
xi 228
xii 271
80.....41, 314-15
525.....263, 312
673.....198-99
674-75.....203

MB

109.....90, 115, 118, 135, 203

PK

90.....241, 298
615-16.....103
633-34.....103

PP

39 290
145.....178, 227
305.....115, 136
309.....117-18
310 .....115, 120, 136
311 .....115, 120, 136
334 218
363.....115, 135-36
364 .....115, 119, 136
372.....115, 136
410 218
429 183
747 176

3SDABC

1140.....181

SG

SG, vols. 1-4 289

1SG

19 290
71 291

1SM

15-58.....253-59
15-23 .....16-18, *23-29*, 52, 146, 250
15-18 95
17 219
18.....86, 219-20
19-21 95
20....16, 70, 123, 141, 219, 240, 252, 261, 286, 296
21 ....14, 15, 16, 51-52, 98, 144, 153, 240, 263
22.....203-204
164-68.....286

3SM

96-98 .....274-75, *288-89*
97.....285, 314

SP

SP vols. 1-4.....289

1SP

20 290
29 290

2SP

101-102.....291
221-22.....292

3SP

198 291
334 291

ST

Nov. 6, 1884.....294

1T

75 286
206-207.....293
296 294

3T

20-21.....41, 314
21 165
142-43 43
160 .....40, 59

5T

685-87 49
686-87.....286-87
706-707 ...42, 258, 264, *303-304*
708 44

6T

123 145
134 91
430 292

TM

106.....250, 311
106-107.....106
169.....121-22
194.....40
302-303.....97
303 97
370.....59, 240

MS AND LETTERS

8a, 1888 (Olson).....176
15, 1888 (Olson) *211-12*, 264, *304-306*
24, 1892 (App G) 212, 240, *307-308*

INDEX 3: GENERAL

A

Abstract and concrete *199-204*
  perception of related to environment ... 200-201
Adventist Review 43, 290
Amenemope, Instruction of 168
Amram's family, size of 217-23
Analytical vs. casual reader 247-48
Andrews, J. N. 274-75, 288, 314
Angry Saints 286
Anointed cherub (Ez. 28) 182
Apocrypha
  Adventist use of 67
  books included in 278
  confused with Scripture 55
  history of 65-67
  meaning of the word *277-78*
Archives, biblical writers use of *157-59*
Arguments, not sound (EGW) 44
Aristeas, Letter of 78-79
Assistants, biblical writers use of *160-62*
Association of Adventist Forums 271
Association of Adventist Librarians (ASDAL) 316
Astronomy vision (EGW) *295-97*
Authority
  based on goodness, not power 90
  culture affects attitude toward 92-94
  human response to *90-97*
Authority of Scripture 261
Azazel (scapegoat, Lev. 16) 182

B

Balaam, spoke by dictation 51
Barclay, William 73
Barr, James 89
Basis text 83-84
Bastards, laws relating to 124
Battle Creek College 50, 268
Battle for the Bible 224, 270
Beegle, Dewey 224
Belshazzar and Nabonidus 231
Berger, Peter 244
Bible, role of in Adventism 314-317
Bible Conference
  of 1919 ..... 50, *268-69*, 271
  of 1974 270-71
Bible Handbook 50
Bible in the Balance 270
Bible Teacher (EGW) 44-45, *306-307*
Boone, Kathleen 89
Branson, W. H. 16, 246
Broadening the spirit (law) 117-18
Butler, G. I. 96-97

C

Caiaphas, spoke by dictation 51
Calvinists vs. Arminians 242
Cana, Wedding of 291-92
Canon *59-68*
  Apocrypha in relationship to 65-67
  comparisons (chart) 60
  definition of word 59
  history of *62-67*
  New Testament 64-65
  Old Testament 63-64
  Spirit's role in forming 61
Canonization process 61-62
Canright, D. M. 246, 268, 288-89, 295-97
Casebook, Scripture as *98-109*
Casual vs. analytical reader 247-48
Changing times, laws related to 122-126
Childs, Brevard 208
Chronicles and Samuel/Kings compared *184-86*
Church of Christ pastor 17
Circumcision, NT attitude toward 148-49
Codebook, Scripture as *98-109*
Coggins, Richard 313
Complutensian Polyglot 81
Concordia Seminary 270
Concrete and abstract compared *199-204*
Conflicting duties, resolving 116-122
Conflict of the Ages series *289-92*
Conservatism, danger of (EGW) 42, 258, *303-304*
Consultation I (Glacier View) 271
Consultation II (Wash. DC) 271-72
Creation, date of 228-29
Crews, Joe 105

D

Dale, Patrick 111
Danby, Herbert 128
Daniel vs. Esther 102-103
Daniells, A. G. 268-69
Dates, numbers, and genealogies *214-236*
David's census 13, *173-76*
Decalogue, in heavenly sanctuary 202-203
Defense vs. Offense 248
Demon-possessed boy healed 188-89, 191-93
Devotional life, linked with casebook *107-109*
Diet, religious vs. rational view 126-29
Disagreeing with a prophet (EGW) *304-306*
Dispensationalism 113-114
Diversity (Bible Teacher, EGW) *306-307*
Dougherty, Raymond 231
Dybdahl, Jon 316

E

Ebla 228
Eclectic text 84
Editing of biblical books *163-72*
  Jeremiah as illustration of 168-71
  Proverbs as illustration of 167-68
Education, influence of book 40
Ellen G. White: Prophet of Destiny 292
Enlightenment (era) 14-15, 140-43, 260
Erasmus 74
Error, danger of using word 19, 144-45
Eschatology, biblical references to 255-57
Esther vs. Daniel 102-103
Eunuchs, laws related to 123-24
Evil, God's responsibility for in OT 179-80
Exodus from Egypt
  dating of *232-36*
  interpretations of (alternative) *299-302*
  number of people in 217-23, 249, 285

F

Family, EGW view of 291-92
Fearing, Richard 250
Flood
  date for 228-29
  extent of 247-48
Food offered to idols 149-50
Ford, Desmond 271
French Revolution, EGW view of 271
"From Sinai to Golgotha" see "Sinai-Golgotha"
Froom, LeRoy 50, 268, 275
Fulfillment of prophecy in Matthew 206
Fundamental Beliefs, Adventist 267
Fundamentalists, growing scholarly interest in 89

G

Gall, drop of, can poison truth (EGW) 145
Gaussen, François 50, 268, 275
Genealogies *225-32*
  dates based on 232
  in Chronicles 229-30
  in Genesis 226-29
  in Matthew 230
  in Luke 230
  show line of descent 231-32
Genealogies, dates and numbers *214-36*
General Conference
  of 1922 269
  of 1883 ....268, 273-75
  of 1980 316
  of 1985 (presession) 315
  of 1990 (presession) 315
Geraty, Lawrence 226
God, names for in OT *279-84*
Graybill, Ron 271
Great Controversy, editing of 268
Grove, J. Paul 13, 244, 251, 310
Gundry, Robert 206

H

Harrelson, Walter 93
Haskell, S. N. 50, 97, 268
Heavenly Court 197-98
Herods, identity of 290-91
High road (interpretation of OT) 227
Historical-critical method 270-72
Historical, relationship to practical 287-88
History of the Sabbath 274-75, 288
Horn, Siegfried 221-22
Hymns and prayers *151-53*

I

"Illumination" defined *46-57, 56-57*
Incarnational view of inspiration *87-97*
In Defense of the Faith 16, 246
Infallible, God and heaven alone are (EGW) ...140
Inscription on cross 187-89, 192-93
Inspiration
  college class in *253-59*
  debate (Protestant) 270
  defined *46-57, 50-56*
  GC action of 1883 on 273-74
  history of issue in Adventism *267-72*
Inspired writers
  being graded for quality 53-55
  quoting other inspired writers *205-213*
Intellectual Christian (EGW) 40
Intelligently serving God (EGW) 59
InterVarsity Fellowship 39
Introduction to GC, see Index 2

J

Jamnia, Council of 63-64
Jehu, son of Omri 231-32
Jeremiah, as model of inspiration 53
Jerome 79-81
Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) *147-50*
Job, authorship of book 181
Johannine Comma 73-74
John 3:16 enough to guide soul (EGW) 59
Johns, Warren 271
Josephus 78
Judges, years Israel was ruled by 234

K

Kermode, Frank 89
Kern, M. E. 269
Knight, George 286

L

Language, dangers of inflammatory.....249-50
Latin Vulgate.....79-81
Law Pyramid.....*110-36*, 260-61
  argument for.....116-131
  biblical basis for (Excrs A).....131-35
  chart of.....115
  EGW comments relating to (Exc B).....135-36
  origin and application of.....118-22
  summary of arguments for.....130-31
Lewis, C. S.....56, 201-202, 204, 257
Life of Mrs. E. G. White.....295-97
Light Bearers to the Remnant.....315-16
Lightfoot, John.....228
Lindsell, Harold.....190, 224, 270
Lindsey, Hal.....114
Logical thinkers, few (EGW).....43
Lord's Prayer.....71
Low road (OT interpretation).....227-28
Lucifer (Isa. 14).....182
Lucifer, fall of, interpreted by EGW.....290
Luke, a Plagiarist?.....48, 190-91, 272

M

Magic, prohibited in Israel.....179
Manuscripts, transmission of.....*69-75*
Marienhoehe Seminary.....93, 192, 310
Marriage, EGW view of.....291-92
Masoretic text (MT) compared with LXX and SP.....226-27
Maxwell, Arthur.....177-78, 248
Memorization, value of.....46-47
Merneptah's Israel Stele.....233
Micaiah's heavenly court vision.....196-97
Ministry.....271
Missions: A Two-way Street.....316
Moabites, laws relating to.....124-25
Mormons, canon of.....62
Moses' killing of the Egyptian.....*208-211*

N

Names for God (OT).....*279-84*
Narrowing the letter (law).....117-18
Neoorthodoxy.....244
New King James Version.....*82-85*
Newsome, James.....184
Nichol, F. D.....16, 316
NIDCC, reliance on secondary sources.....246
Noorbergen, Rene.....292
North Pacific Union.....13, 250
Noth, Martin.....300-301
Number of people in Exodus from Egypt..*217-23*
Numbers, genealogies, and dates.....*214-236*
Numbers, large (in OT).....*223-25*
Numbers, Ron.....294

O

Obedience.....261
Offense vs. defense.....248
Optimist (Prov.).....154-56
Ordination of women.....98-99
Our Firm Foundation.....105

P

Pacific Union College.....46
Parallel passages.....*173-95*
  David's census.....13, *173-76*
  demon-possessed boy healed.. 188-89, 191-93
  inscription on cross.....187-89, 192-93
  NT examples.....*187-95*
  OT examples.....*173-86*
  Peter's denials.....187, 190
  value of.....13-15
Patriarchs, ages of first twenty.....226-28
Pessimist (Eccl.).....154-56
Peter's denials.....187, 190
Peterson, William.....271
Phrenology, EGW's view of.....294-95
Planets, EGW's vision of.....295-97
Pork, early Adventist attitudes toward.....292-94
Potok, Chaim.....89
Practical approach, benefits of (summary)..*262-64*
Prayers (biblical).....*151-53*
PREACH seminar.....17
Prescott, W. W.....50, 243, 268-69, 287
"Present truth," changes in (EGW).....176-77
Prophets, grading for quality.....53-55
Publishers, Adventist, dilemma facing.....315-16
Pyramid of law, see law pyramid

Q

Questions and Answers.....51-52
Questions on Doctrine.....16
Quotations (inspired) cited by inspired writers.....*205-213*

R

Rand, Howard.....113
Rea, Walter.....271
Record keeping, heavenly.....201
Reform, patience in (EGW).....41
Rehoboam Principle.....*241-52*, 297-98
"Religious" response to law.....*110-114*
Research
  augments revelation.....48
  biblical writers use of.....*157-59*
Revelation
  Bible itself as.....48
  defined.....*46-57, 47-49*
  general and special.....47-48
  related to reason, and Spirit.....261-62

Review and Herald 269
Rice, George....48, 190-91, 272
Robertson, John 106
Robinson, D. E. 292
Robinson, Joseph 313
Rodd, C. S. 313

S

Sam. Pent. (SP) compared with MT and LXX 226-27
Samaritans 63
Samuel/Kings and Chronicles compared *184-186*
Sanctuary
doctrine of 271
heavenly and earthly....202-203
perception of in Canaanite world.... 202
perception of in Platonic world 202
Satan
meaning of word....180
role in OT *176-83*
Scapegoat (Azazel, Lev. 16)....182
Second death 198-99
Secondary sources, use of 309-317
Secretaries, biblical writers use of....*160-62*
Selected Messages, see Index 2
Septuagint (LXX)
compared with MT and SP 226-27
history of....65-66
Serpent (Gen. 3 and Rev. 12)....181-82
Seventh-Day Adventism Renounced 246, 268, 288-89
Signs of the Times....43, 51
Sinai-Golgotha series....43, 114, 290
Slippery Slope....*241-52*
Smith, Uriah 271, 274-75, 288
Social support....19, 243-44
Sources, EGW use of 288
Spectrum 271
Spirit of Prophecy, vols. 1-4 .... *289-92*
Spiritual Gifts, vols. 1-4 ....*289-91*
Story of Our Health Message.... 292
Storytellers, needs for freedom 248-49
Summary (overall) *260-64*
Synoptic problem, see parallel passages

T

Testimonies, revision of 268, *273-75*, 288-89
Theonomic urge 112-13
Theopneustia 50
Thousand, meaning of OT word.... 223
Translations....*76-86*
changes in resisted....78-85

U

Uncle Arthur (Maxwell) 177-78, 288
Unity of Scripture not voted by resolution (EGW) 212, 240, *307-308*
Unity through diversity 44, *306-307*
Ussher, Archbishop....*228*

V

Visions....*196-204*

W

Waggoner, E. J., EGW disagrees with 211-12, 304-306
Waggoner, J. H. 292
Walla Walla College 98, 250
Washburn, J. S. 269
Wesley, John, inerrancy view of 87, 220
Westwind....98, 290
White, Ellen G.
counsel of, need not be based on direct vision (EGW) 49, 286
publications 269
SDA defense of....16
social support from 17-20
theological development of.... 289-92
view of inspiration 16-20
White, James 286
White Lie 271
White, W. C. (Willie)....50, 268, 275
Who's Afraid of OT God?, reviews of....312-13
Wilcox, F. M. 269
Wilcox, Milton C. 51-52
Wisdom literature (biblical) *154-56*
Wood, Leon 301
Wycliffe, inspiring example of 41, 314-15

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